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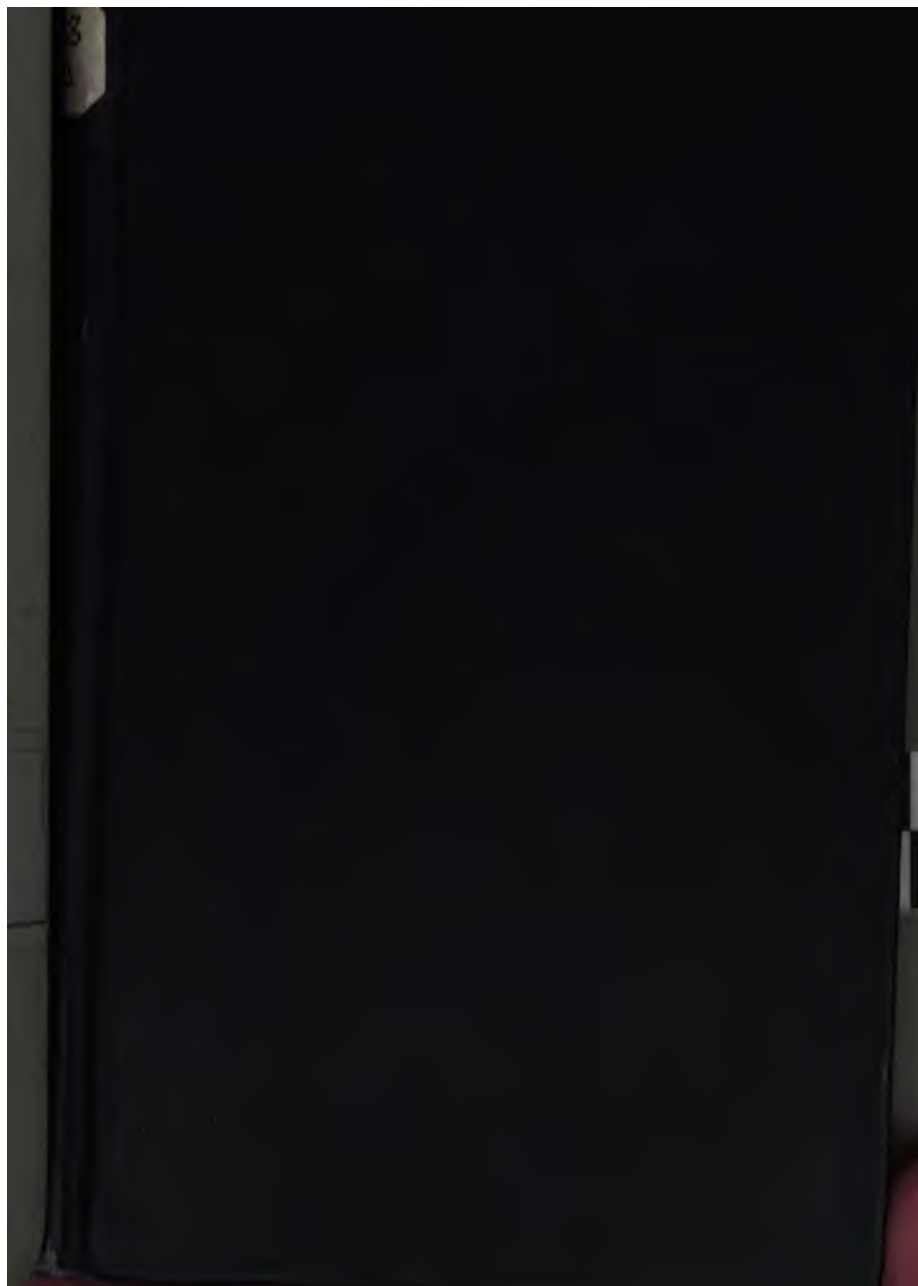
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THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

THREE ESSAYS.

I. *THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.*

By JOHN MORLEY.

II. *HINTS ON THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.*

By HENRY J. NICOLL.

III. *THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.*

By LESLIE STEPHEN.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

ALBERT F. BLAISDELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE STUDY OF ENGLISH CLASSICS," "FIRST STEPS
WITH AMERICAN AND BRITISH AUTHORS," ETC.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE STUDY OF LITERATURE. AN ADDRESS BY JOHN MORLEY	3
II. HINTS ON THE STUDY OF ENG- LISH LITERATURE. HENRY NI- COLL'S INTRODUCTION TO "LANDMARKS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE"	43
III. THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERA- TURE. AN ADDRESS BY LESLIE STE- PHEN	71

INTRODUCTION.

SINCE the publication of a series of articles two years ago in the London *Pall Mall Gazette* and other periodicals on the "Best Hundred Books," the discussion has branched off on to the subject of English literature. The leading English periodicals have furnished one or more articles for the discussion. Of the noteworthy contributions, two have attracted the attention of students of literature, both from the reputation of the authors and the real worth of their literary productions. We refer to the annual address of last year, given by John Morley to the students of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching, Feb. 26, 1887, and a lecture delivered by Leslie Stephen to the Students' Association of St. Andrews, March 26, 1887.

The text of these two addresses has been given in full in the succeeding pages.

Such men as Morley and Stephen do not lecture unless they have something to say. What they have to say on English literature is of special weight, for they have made it a life-long study. ~~Hence these addresses are scholarly, crisp, and interesting.~~ To these two articles we have added a third, "Hints on the Study of English Literature," by Henry J. Nicoll, the introductory chapter to his excellent text-book called "*Landmarks of English Literature.*" This was written several years ago, but it is of special interest to students in connection with the two addresses.

Such notes have been added as will serve to make the text more easily understood by the general reader. It is ~~to be~~ hoped that the three articles will be helpful and stimulating to teachers and students of English literature.

ALBERT F. BLAISDELL

PROVIDENCE, R. I., August, 1888.

ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

THE ANNUAL ADDRESS
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE LONDON SOCIETY FOR
THE EXTENSION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING,
DELIVERED AT THE MANSION HOUSE,
FEBRUARY 26, 1887

BY JOHN MORLEY¹

WHEN my friend Mr. Goschen² invited me to discharge the duty which has fallen to me this afternoon I confess that I complied with very great misgivings. He desired me to say something, if I could, on the literary side of education. Now, it is almost impossible—and I think those

¹The Right Honorable John Morley was born in 1838, graduated at Oxford and is a lawyer by profession. He was editor of the *Fortnightly Review* from 1867 to 1882, of the *Pall Mall Gazette* from 1880 to 1883, and of *Macmillan's Magazine* from 1883 to 1885. On the formation of Gladstone's Home Rule Cabinet in 1886, Mr. Morley was made Chief Secretary for Ireland. He has been a prominent member of the House of Parliament. Mr. Morley has made many and notable contributions to literature. Among them, are "Edward Burke" "Voltaire," "Rousseau," and "Richard Cobden." He is the editor of the well known "English Men of Letters Series."

²The Right Honorable George Joachim Goschen, Chancellor of the Exchequer, born in 1831 and graduated at Oxford. He has written largely on financial questions.

who know most of literature will be readiest to agree with me—to say anything new in recommendation of literature in a scheme of education. But, as tax-payers know, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer levies a contribution, he is not a person to be trifled with. I have felt, moreover, that Mr. Goschen has worked with such extreme zeal and energy for so many years on behalf of this good cause, that anybody whom he considered able to render him any co-operation, owed it to him in its fullest extent. The Lord Mayor has been kind enough to say that I am especially qualified to speak on English literature. I must, however, remind the Lord Mayor that I have strayed from literature into the region of politics; and I am not at all sure that such a journey conduces to the soundness of one's judgment on literary subjects, or adds much to the force of one's arguments on behalf of literary study. Politics are a field where action is one long second-best, and where the choice constantly lies between two blunders. Nothing can be more unlike in aim, in ideals, in method, and in matter, than are literature and politics. I have, however, determined to do the best that I can; and I feel how great an honor it is to be invited to partake in a movement which I do not scruple to call one of the

most important of all those now taking place in English society.

What is the object of the movement?¹ What do the promoters aim at? I take it that what they aim at is to bring the very best teaching that the country can afford, through the hands of the most thoroughly competent men, within the reach of every class of the community. Their object is to give to the many that sound, systematic, and methodical knowledge, which has hitherto been the privilege of the few who can afford the time and money to go to Oxford and Cambridge; to diffuse the fertilizing waters of intellectual knowledge from their great and copious fountain heads at the Universities by a thousand irrigating channels over the whole of our busy, indomitable land. Gentlemen, this a most important point. Goethe said that nothing is more frightful than a teacher who only knows what his scholars are intended to know. We may depend upon it that the man that knows his own subject most thoroughly, is most likely to excite interest about it in the minds of other people. We hear, perhaps, more often than we like, that we live in a democratic age. It is true enough, and I can conceive nothing more democratic than such a movement as this, nothing which

¹ See Appendix. p. 39 .

is more calculated to remedy defects that are incident to democracy, more thoroughly calculated to raise democracy to heights which other forms of government and older orderings of society have never yet attained. No movement can be more wisely democratic than one which seeks to give to the northern miner or the London artisan knowledge as good and as accurate though he may not have so much of it, as if he were a student at Oxford or Cambridge. Something of the same kind may be said of the new frequency with which scholars of great eminence and consummate accomplishments, like Jowett, Lang, Myers, Leaf, and others, bring all their scholarship to bear, in order to provide for those who are not able, or do not care, to read old classics in the originals, brilliant and faithful renderings of them in our own tongue. Nothing but good, I am persuaded, can come of all these attempts to connect learning with the living forces of society, and to make industrial England a sharer in the classic tradition of the lettered world.

I am well aware that there is an apprehension that the present extraordinary zeal for education in all its forms—elementary, secondary, and higher—may bear in its train some evils of its own. It is said that nobody in England is now content to prac-

tise a handicraft, and that every one seeks to be at least a clerk. It is said that the moment is even already at hand when a great deal of practical distress does and must result from this tendency. I remember years ago that in the United States I heard something of the same kind. All I can say is, that this tendency, if it exists, is sure to right itself. In no case can the spread of so mischievous a notion as that knowledge and learning ought not to come within the reach of handicraftsmen, be attributed to literature. There is a famous passage in which Pericles, the great Athenian, describing the glory of the community of which he was so far-shining a member, says, "We at Athens are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes; we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness." But then remember that after all Athenian society rested on a basis of slavery. Athenian citizens were able to pursue their love of the beautiful, and their simplicity, and to cultivate their minds without loss of manliness, because the drudgery and hard work and rude service of society were performed by those who had no share in all these good things. With us, happily, it is very different. We are all more or less upon a level. Our object is—and it is that which in my opinion raises us infinitely above the Athenian level—to bring the

Periclean ideas of beauty and simplicity and cultivation of the mind within the reach of those who do the drudgery and the service and rude work of the world. And it can be done—do not let us be afraid—it can be done without in the least degree impairing the skill of our handicraftsmen or the manliness of our national life. It can be done without blunting or numbing the practical energies of our people.

I know they say that if you meddle with literature you are less qualified to take your part in practical affairs. You run a risk of being labelled a dreamer and a theorist. But, after all, if we take the very highest form of all practical energy—the governing of the country—all this talk is ludicrously untrue. I venture to say that in the present Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, there are three men at least, who are perfectly capable of earning their bread as men of letters. In the late Government, besides the Prime Minister, there were also three men of letters, and I have never heard that those three were greater simpletons than their neighbors. There is a Commission now at work on a very important and abstruse subject. I am told that no one there displays so acute an intelligence of the difficulties that are to be met, and the important argu-

ments that are brought forward, and the practical ends to be achieved, as the chairman of the Commission, who is not what is called a practical man, but a man of study, literature, theoretical speculation, and university training. Oh no, gentlemen, some of the best men of business in the country are men who have had the best collegian's equipment, and are the most accomplished bookmen.

It is true that we cannot bring to London with this movement, the indefinable charms that haunts the gray and venerable quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge. We cannot take you into the stately halls, the silent and venerable libraries, the solemn chapels, the studious old-world gardens. We cannot surround you with all those elevated memorials and sanctifying associations of scholars and poets, of saints and sages, that march in glorious procession through the ages, and make of Oxford and Cambridge a dream of music for the inward ear, and of delight for the contemplative eye. We cannot bring all that to you; but I hope, and I believe, it is the object of those who are more intimately connected with the society than I have been, that every partaker of the benefits of this society will feel himself and herself in living connection with those two famous centres, and feel conscious of the links that bind

the modern to the older England. One of the most interesting facts mentioned in your report this year—and I am particularly interested in it for personal reasons—is that last winter four prizes of £10 each were offered in the Northumberland mining district, one each to the male and female student in every term who should take the highest place in the examination, in order to enable them to spend a month in Cambridge in the long vacation for the purpose of carrying on in the laboratories and museums the work in which they had been engaged in the winter at the local centre. That is not a step taken by our society; but Cambridge University has inspired and worked out the scheme, and I am not without hope that from London some of those who attend these classes may be able to go and have a taste of what Oxford and Cambridge are like. I like to think how poor scholars three or four hundred years ago used to flock to Oxford, regardless of cold, privation, and hardship, so that they might satisfy their hunger and thirst for knowledge. I like to think of them in connection with this movement. I like to think of them in connection with students like those miners in Northumberland, whom I know well, and who are mentioned in the report of the Cambridge Extension Society as, after

a day's hard work in the pit, walking four or five miles through cold and darkness and rough roads to hear a lecture, and then walking back again the same four or five miles. You must look for the same enthusiasm, the same hunger and thirst for knowledge, that presided over the foundation of the Universities many centuries ago, to carry on this work, to strengthen and stimulate men's faith in knowledge, their hopes from it, and their zeal for it.

The progress of the Society has been most remarkable.¹ In 1876 there were, I find, five centres and seven courses. This year there are thirty-one centres and sixty courses. But to get a survey of this movement, you must look not only at London, but at the Oxford and Cambridge societies. You find there that Oxford has twenty-two centres and twenty-nine courses, and Cambridge has fifty centres and eighty courses. I say that the thought of all this activity, and all the good of every kind, social, moral, and intellectual, which is being done by means of it, is in the highest degree encouraging, and not only encouraging, but calculated to inspire in every man who has ever felt the love and thirst for knowledge, the deepest interest in the movement and the warmest wishes for its farther success.

¹ See Table in Appendix.

Speaking now of the particular kind of knowledge of which I am going to say a few words—how does literature fare in these important operations? Last term out of fifty-seven courses in the Cambridge scheme there were ten on literature; out of thirty-one of our courses, seven were on literature. Well, I am bound to say I think that that position for literature in the scheme is very reasonably satisfactory. I have made some inquiries, since I knew that I was going to speak here, in the great popular centres of industry in the North and in Scotland as to the popularity of literature as a subject of teaching. I find very much what I should have expected. The professors all tell very much the same story. This is, that it is extremely hard to interest any considerable number of people in subjects that seem to have no direct bearing upon the practical work of every-day life. There is a disinclination to study literature for its own sake, or to study anything which does not seem to have a visible and direct influence upon the daily work of life. The nearest approach to a taste for literature is a certain demand for instruction in history with a little flavor of contemporary politics. In short, the demand for instruction in literature is strictly moderate. That is what men of experience tell me, and we have to recog-

nise it. I cannot profess to be very much surprised. Mr. Goschen, when he spoke—I think in Manchester—some years ago, said there were three motives which might induce people to seek the higher education. First, to obtain greater knowledge for bread-winning purposes. From that point of view science would be most likely to feed the classes. Secondly, the improvement of one's knowledge of political economy, and history, and facts bearing upon the actual political work and life of the day. Thirdly,—and I am quite content to take Mr. Goschen's enumeration,—was the desire of knowledge as a luxury to brighten life and kindle thought. I am very much afraid that, in the ordinary temper of our people, and the ordinary mode of looking at life, the last of these motives savors a little of self-indulgence, sentimentality, and other objectionable qualities. There is a great stir in the region of physical science at this moment, and it is, in my judgment, likely to take a chief and foremost place in the field of intellectual activity. After the severity with which science was for so many ages treated by literature, I cannot wonder that science now retaliates, now mightily exalt herself, and thrusts literature down into the lower place. I only have to say on the relative claims of science and literature what the great Dr.

Arnold said:—"If one might wish for impossibilities, I might then wish that my children might be well versed in physical science, but in due subordination to the fulness and freshness of their knowledge on moral subjects. This, however, I believe cannot be; wherefore, rather than have it the principal thing in my sons' mind, I would gladly have him think that the sun went round the earth, and that the stars were so many spangles set in the bright blue firmament."¹ I am glad to think that one may know something of these matters, and yet not believe that the sun goes round the earth. But of the two, I, for one, am not prepared to accept the rather enormous pretensions that are nowadays sometimes made for physical science as the be-all and end-all of education.

Next to this we know that there is a great stir on behalf of technical and commercial education. The special needs of our time and country compel us to pay a particular attention to this subject. Here knowledge is business, and we shall never hold our industrial pre-eminence, with all that hangs upon that pre-eminence, unless we push on technical and commercial education with all our might. But there is—and now I come nearer my subject—a

¹ Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, ii. 31.

third kind of knowledge which, too, in its own way is business. There is the cultivation of the sympathies and imagination, the quickening of the moral sensibilities, and the enlargement of the moral vision. The great need in our modern culture, which is scientific in method, rationalistic in spirit, and utilitarian in purpose, is to find some effective agency for cherishing within us the ideal. That is, I take it, the business and function of literature. Literature alone will not make a good citizen; it will not make a good man. History affords too many proofs that scholarship and learning by no means purge men of acrimony, of vanity, of arrogance, of a murderous tenacity about trifles. Mere scholarship and learning and the knowledge of books do not by any means arrest and dissolve all the travelling acids of the human system. Nor would I pretend for a moment that literature can be any substitute for life and action. Burke said, "What is the education of the generality of the world? Reading a parcel of books? No! Restraint and discipline, examples of virtue and justice, these are what form the education of the world." That is profoundly true; it is life that is the great educator. But the parcel of books, if they are well chosen, reconcile us to this discipline; they interpret this virtue and justice;

they awaken within us the diviner mind, and rouse us to a consciousness of what is best in others and ourselves.

As a matter of rude fact, there is much to make us question whether the spread of literature, as now understood, does awaken the diviner mind. The figures of the books that are taken out from public libraries are not all that we could wish. I am not going to inflict many figures on you, but there is one set of figures that distresses book-lovers, I mean the enormous place that fiction occupies in the books taken out. In one great town in the North prose fiction forms 76 per cent of the books taken out. In another great town prose fiction is 82 per cent; in a third 84 per cent; and in a fourth 67 per cent. I had the curiosity to see what happens in the libraries of the United States; and there—supposing the system of cataloguing and enumeration to be the same—they are a trifle more serious in their taste than we are; where our average is about 70 per cent, at a place like Chicago it is only about 60 per cent. In Scotland, too, it ought to be said that they have what I call a better average in respect to prose fiction. There is a larger demand for books called serious than in England. And I suspect, though I do not know, that one reason why there is in Scotland a

greater demand for the more serious classes of literature than fiction, is that in Scotch Universities there are what we have not in England—well-attended chairs of literature, systematically and methodically studied. Do not let it be supposed that I at all underrate the value of fiction. On the contrary, I think when a man has done a hard day's work, he can do nothing better than fall to and read the novels of Walter Scott or Miss Austen, or some of our living writers. I am rather a voracious reader of fiction myself. I do not, therefore, point to it as a reproach or as a source of discouragement that fiction takes so large a place in the objects of literary interest. I only insist that it is much too large, and we should be better pleased if it sank to about 40 per cent, and what is classified as general literature rose from 13 to 25 per cent.

There are other complaints of literature as an object of interest in this country. I was reading the other day an essay by the late head of my old college at Oxford—a very learned and remarkable man—Mark Pattison,¹ who was a book-lover if ever there was one. Now, he complained that the bookseller's bill in the ordinary Eng-

¹ Mark Pattison (1813-1884) the distinguished Rector of Oriel College, Oxford, and famous scholar, made many valuable contributions to literature. He is well known for his writings on John Milton.

lish middle class family is shamefully small. He thought it monstrous that a man who is earning £1000 a year should spend less than £1 a week on books—that is to say, less than a shilling in the pound per annum. Well, I know that Chancellors of the Exchequer take from us 8d. or 6d. in the pound, and I am not sure that they always use it as wisely as if they left us to spend it on books. Still, a shilling in the pound to be spent on books by a clerk who earns a couple of hundred pounds a year, or by a workman who earns a quarter of that sum, is rather more, I think, than can be reasonably expected. I do not believe for my part that a man really needs to have a great many books. Pattison said that nobody who respected himself could have less than 1000 volumes. He pointed out that you can stack 1000 octavo volumes in a book-case that shall be 13 feet by 10 feet, and 6 inches deep, and that everybody has that space at disposal. Still the point is not that men should have a great many books, but that they should have the right ones, and that they should use those that they have. We may all agree in lamenting that there are so many houses—even some of considerable social pretension—where you will not find a good atlas, a good dictionary, or a good cyclopædia of reference. What

is still more lamentable, in a good many more houses where these books are, they are never referred to, or opened. That is a very discreditable fact, because I defy anybody to take up a copy of the *Times* newspaper — and I speak in the presence of gentlemen well up in all that is going on in the world — and not come upon something in it, upon which they would be wise to consult an atlas, dictionary, or cyclopædia of reference.

I do not think for a single moment that everybody is born with the ability for using books, for reading and studying literature. Certainly not everybody is born with the capacity of being a great scholar. All people are no more born great scholars like Gibbon and Bentley, than they are all born great musicians like Handel and Beethoven. What is much worse than that, many are born with the incapacity of reading, just as they are born with the incapacity of distinguishing one tune from another. To them I have nothing to say. Even the morning paper is too much for them. They can only skim the surface even of that. I go farther, and I frankly admit that the habit and power of reading with reflection, comprehension, and memory all alert and awake, does not come at once to the natural man, any more than many other sovereign virtues

come to that interesting creature. What I do submit to you and press upon you with great earnestness is, that it requires no preterhuman force of will in any young man or woman—unless household circumstances are unusually vexatious and unfavorable—to get at least half an hour out of a solid busy day for good and disinterested reading. Some will say that this is to much to except, and the first persons to say it, I venture to predict, will be those who waste their time most. At any rate, if I cannot get half an hour I will be content with a quarter. Now, in half an hour I fancy you can read fifteen or twenty pages of Burke; or you can read one of Wordsworth's masterpieces—say the lines on Tintern; or say, one-third—if a scholar, in the original, and if not, in a translation—of a book of the Iliad, or the Æneid. I am not filling the half hour too full. But try for yourselves what you can read in half an hour. Then multiply the half hour by 365, and consider what treasures you might have laid by at the end of the year; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you for a lifetime.

I will not take up your time by explaining the various mechanical contrivances and aids to successful study. They are not to be despised by those who would

extract the most from books. Many people think of knowledge as of money. They would like knowledge, but cannot face the perseverance and self-denial that go to the acquisition of it, as they go to the acquisition of money. The wise student will do most of his reading with a pen or a pencil in his hand. He will not shrink from the useful toil of making abstracts and summaries of what he is reading. Sir William Hamilton was a strong advocate for underscoring books of study. "Intelligent underlining," he said, "gave a kind of abstract of an important work, and by the use of different colored inks to mark a difference of contents, and discriminate the doctrinal from the historical or illustrative elements of an argument or exposition, the abstract became an analysis very serviceable for ready reference."¹ This assumes, as Hamilton said, that the book to be operated on is your own, and perhaps is rather too elaborate a counsel of perfection for most of us. Again, some great men—Gibbon was one, and Daniel Webster was another, and the great Lord Strafford was a third—always before reading a book made a short, rough analysis of the questions which they expected to be answered in it, the additions to be made to their knowledge, and whither it would take them. I

¹ Veitch's *Life of Hamilton*, 314, 392.

have sometimes tried that way of steady-ing and guiding attention; I have never done so without advantage; and I commend it to you. I need not tell you that you will find that most books worth reading once are worth reading twice, and — what is most important of all—the masterpieces of literature are worth reading a thousand times. It is a great mistake to think that because you have read a masterpiece once or twice, or ten times, therefore you have done with it. Because it is a masterpiece, you ought to live with it, and make it part of your daily life. Another practice which I commend to you is that of keeping a common-place book, and transcribing into it what is striking and interesting and suggestive. And if you keep it wisely, as Locke has taught us, you will put every entry under a head, division, or sub-division.¹ This is an excellent practice for concentrating your thought on the passage and making you alive to its real point and significance.

Various correspondents have asked me to say something about those lists of a hundred books,² that have been circulating

¹ "If I would put anything in my Common-place Book, I find out a head to which I may refer it. Each head ought to be some important and essential word to the matter in hand" (Locke's *Works*, iii. 308, ed. 1801). This is for indexing purposes, but it is worth while to go further and make a title for the passage extracted, indicating its pith and purport.

² The subject of the "Best Hundred books" was sharply dis-

through the universe within the last few months. I have examined some of these lists with considerable care, and whatever else may be said of them—and I speak of them with great deference and reserve, because men for whom I have a great regard have compiled them—they do not seem to me to be calculated either to create or satisfy a wise taste for literature in any very worthy sense. To fill a man with a hundred parcels of heterogeneous scraps from the *Mahabharata*, and the *Sheking*, down to *Pickwick* and *White's Selborne*, may pass the time, but I don't think it would strengthen or instruct or delight. For instance, it is a mistake to think that every book that has a great name in the history of books or of thought is worth reading. Some of the most famous books are least worth reading. Their fame was due to their doing something that needed in their day to be done. The work done, the virtue of the book expires. Again, I agree with those who say that the steady working down one of these lists would end in the manufacture of that obnoxious product—the prig. A prig has been defined as an animal that is over-fed for its size. I think

cussed in England in 1886. The *Pall Mall Gazette* [London] took the lead in the discussion. For a symposium of the subject see the *Pall Mall Gazette* "Extra" No. 24. See also Sir John Lubbock's *Pleasures of Life* in *The Choice of Books*.

p. 117
that these bewildering miscellanies would lead to an immense quantity of that kind of overfeeding. The object of reading is not to dip into everything that even wise men have ever written. In the words of one of the most winning writers of English that ever existed — Cardinal Newman — the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address, and expression. These are the objects of that intellectual perfection which a literary education is destined to give. I will not venture on a list of a hundred books, but will recommend you to one book well worthy of your attention. Those who are curious as to what they should read in the region of pure literature, will do well to peruse my friend Mr. Frederic Harrison's volume, called the *The Choice of Books*. You will find there as much wise thought, eloquently and brilliantly put, as in any volume of its size and on its subject, whether it be in the list of a hundred or not.

Let me pass to another topic. We are often asked whether it is best to study subjects, or authors, or books. Well, I think that is like most of the stock questions with which the perverse ingenuity of

mankind torments itself. There is no universal and exclusive answer. It is idle. It was put to me that I should say something on it. My answer is a very plain one, and it is this. It is sometimes best to study books, sometimes authors, and sometimes subjects; but at all times it is best to study authors, subjects, and books in connection with one another. Whether you make your first approach from interest in an author or in a book, the fruit will be only half gathered if you leave off without new ideas and clearer lights both on the man and the matter. One of the noblest masterpieces in the literature of civil and political wisdom is to be found in Burke's three pieces on the American War—his speech on Taxation in 1774, on Conciliation in 1775, and his letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol in 1777.¹ I can only repeat to you what I have been saying in print and out of it for a good many years, and what I believe more firmly as observation is enlarged by time and occasion, that these three pieces are the most perfect manual in all literature for the study of great affairs, whether for the purpose of knowledge or action.

"They are an example," as I have said before now, "an example without fault of all

¹ See Burke's *Select Works*, Vol. 1, Edited by E. J. Payne, Clarendon Press Series.

the qualities which the critic, whether a theorist or an actor, of great political situations should strive by night and by day to possess. If their subject were as remote as the quarrel between the Corinthians and Corcyra, or the war between Rome and the Allies, instead of a conflict to which the world owes the opportunity of the most important of political experiments, we should still have everything to learn from the author's treatment; the vigorous grasp of masses of compressed detail, the wide illumination from great principles of human experience, the strong and masculine feeling for the two great political ends of Justice and Freedom, the large and generous interpretation of expediency, the morality, the vision, the noble temper."

No student worthy of the name will lay aside these pieces, so admirable in their literary expression, so important for history, so rich in the lessons of civil wisdom, until he has found out something from other sources as to the circumstances from which such writings arose, and as to the man whose resplendent genius inspired them. There are great personalities like Burke who march through history with voices like a clarion trumpet and something like the glitter of swords in their hands. They are as interesting as

their work. Contact with them warms and kindles the mind. You will not be content, after reading one of these pieces without knowing the character and personality of the man who conceived it, and until you have spent an hour or two—and an hour or two will go a long way with Burke still fresh in your mind—over other compositions in political literature, over Bacon's civil pieces, or Malchiavelli's *Prince*, and others in the same order of thought. That is my answer to the question whether you should study books, subjects, or authors. This points to the right answer to another question that is constantly asked. We are constantly asked whether desultory reading is among things lawful and permitted. May we browse at large in a library, as Johnson said, or is it forbidden to open a book without a definite aim and fixed expectations? I am for a compromise. If a man has once got his general point of view, if he has striven with success to place himself at the centre, what follows is of less consequence. If he has got in his head a good map of the country, he may ramble at large with impunity. If he has once well and truly laid the foundations of a methodical, systematic, habit of mind, what he reads will find its way to its proper place. If his intellect is in good order, he will find in

every quarter something to assimilate and something that will nourish.

Now I am going to deal with another question, with which perhaps I ought to have started. What is literature? It has often been defined. Emerson says it is a record of the best thoughts. "By literature," says another author, I think Mr. Stopford Brooke, "we mean the written thoughts and feelings of intelligent men and women arranged in a way that shall give pleasure to the reader." A third account is that "the aim of a student of literature is to know the best that has been thought in the world." Definitions always appear to me in these things to be in the nature of vanity. I feel that the attempt to be compact in the definition of literature, ends in something that is rather meagre, partial, starved, and unsatisfactory. I turn to the answer given by a great French writer to a question not quite the same; viz., "What is a classic?" Literature consists of a whole body of classics in the true sense of the word, and a classic, as Saint Beuve defines him, is an "author who has enriched the human mind, who has really added to its treasure, who has got it to take a step farther; who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or penetrated to some eternal passion, in that heart of man where it seemed

as though all were known and explored; who has produced his thought, or his observation, or his invention under some form, no matter what, so it be great, large, acute, and reasonable, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, yet a style which finds itself a style of everybody,—in a style that is at once new and antique, and is the contemporary of all the ages.” At a single hearing you may not take all that in; but if you should have any opportunity of recurring to it you will find this a satisfactory, full, and instructive account of what is a classic, and will find in it a full and satisfactory account of what those who have thought most on literature hope to get from it, and most would desire to confer upon others by it. Literature consists of all the books—and they are not so many—where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form. My notion of the literary student is one who through books, explores the strange voyages of man’s moral reason, the impulses of the human heart, the chances and changes that have overtaken human ideals of virtue and happiness, of conduct and manners, and the shifting fortunes of great conceptions of truth and virtue. Poets, dramatists, humorists, satirists, masters of fiction,

✓ the great preachers, the character-writers,
✓ the maxim-writers, the great political orators — they are all literature in so far as they teach us to know man and to know human nature. This is what makes literature, rightly sifted and selected, and rightly studied, not the mere elegant trifling that it is so often and so erroneously supposed to be, but a proper instrument for a systematic training of the imagination and sympathies, and of a genial and varied moral sensibility.

h. 28
From this point of view let me remind you that books are not the products of accident and caprice. As Goethe said, if you would understand an author, you must understand his age. The same thing is just as true of a book. If you would comprehend it, you must know the age. There is an order; there are causes and relations. There are relations between great compositions and the societies from which they have emerged. I would put it in this way to you, that just as the naturalist strives to understand and to explain the distribution of plants and animals over the surface of the globe, to connect their presence or their absence with the great geological, climatic, and oceanic changes, so the student of literature, if he be wise, undertakes an ordered and connected survey of ideas, of tastes, of sentiments, of imagination, of

humor, of invention, as they affect and as they are affected by the ever-changing experiences of human nature, and the manifold variations that time and circumstances are incessantly working in human society.

It is because I am possessed, and desire to see others possessed, by that conception of literary study, that I watch with the greatest sympathy and admiration the efforts of those who are striving so hard, and, I hope, so successfully, to bring the systematic and methodical study of our own literature, in connection with other literatures, among subjects for teaching and examination in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. I regard those efforts with the liveliest interest and sympathy. Everybody agrees that an educated man ought to have a general notion of the course of the great outward events of European history. So, too, an educated man ought to have a general notion of the course of all those inward thoughts and moods which find their expression in literature. I think that in cultivating the study of literature, as I have rather laboriously endeavored to define it, you will be cultivating the most important side of history. Knowledge of it gives stability and substance to character. It gives us a view of the ground we stand on. It gives us a solid backing of prece-

dent and experience. It teaches us where we are. It protects us against imposture and surprise.

Before closing, I should like to say one word upon the practise of composition. I have suffered, by the chance of life, very much from the practise of composition. It has been my lot, I suppose, to read more unpublished work than any one else in this room, and, I hope, in this city. There is an idea, and I venture to think, a very mistaken idea, that you cannot have a taste for literature unless you are yourself an author. I make bold entirely to demur to that proposition. It is practically more mischievous, and leads scores and even hundreds of people to waste their time in the most unprofitable manner that the wit of man can devise, on work in which they can no more achieve even the most moderate excellence than they can compose a Ninth Symphony or paint a Transfiguration. It is a terrible error to suppose that because you relish "Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted idyll, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie," therefore you have a call to run off to write bad verse at the Lake or the Isle of Wight. I beseech you not all to turn to authorship. I will go further. I venture with all respect to those who are teachers of literature, to doubt the excellence and utility of the

practise of over-much essay-writing and composition. I have very little faith in rules of style, though I have an unbounded faith in the virtue of cultivating direct and precise expression. But you must carry on the operation inside the mind, and not merely by practising literary deportment on paper. It is not everybody who can command the mighty rhythm of the greatest masters of human speech. But every one can make reasonably sure that he knows what he means, and whether he has found the right word. These are internal operations, and are not forwarded by writing for writing's sake. I am strong for attention to expression, if that attention be exercised in the right way. It has been said a million times that the foundation of right expression in speech or writing is sincerity. It is as true now as it has ever been. Right expression is a part of character. As somebody has said, by learning to speak with precision, you learn to think with correctness; and firm and vigorous speech lies through the cultivation of high and noble sentiments. } I think, as far as my observation has gone, that men will do better for reaching precision by studying carefully and with an open mind and a vigilant eye the great models of writing, than by excessive practise of writing on their own account.

Much might here be said on what is one of the most important of all the sides of literary study. I mean its effect as helping to preserve the dignity and the purity of the English language. That noble instrument has never been exposed to such dangers as those which beset it to-day. Domestic slang, scientific slang, pseudo-æsthetic affectations, hideous importations from American newspapers, all bear down with horrible force upon the glorious fabric which the genius of our race has reared. I will say nothing of my own on this pressing theme, but will read to you a passage of weight and authority from the greatest master of mighty and beautiful speech.

"Whoever in a state," said Milton, "knows how wisely to form the manners of men and to rule them at home and in war with excellent institutes, him in the first place, above others, I should esteem worthy of all honor. But next to him the man who strives to establish in maxims and rules the method and habit of speaking and writing received from a good age of the nation, and, as it were, to fortify the same round with a kind of wall, the daring to overleap which let a law only short of that of Romulus be used to prevent. . . . The one, as I believe, supplies noble courage and intrepid counsels against an enemy invading the territory. The other takes to himself the task of extirpating and defeating, by means of a learned detective police of ears, and a light band of good authors, that barbarism which makes large inroads upon the minds of men, and is a destructive intestine enemy of genius. Nor is it to be considered of small consequence what language, pure or corrupt, a people has, or what is their customary degree of propriety in speaking it. . . . For, let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly-yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of ser-

vility? On the other hand, we have never heard that any empire, any state, did not at least flourish in a middling degree as long as its own liking and care for its language lasted."¹

The probabilities are that we are now coming to an epoch, as it seems to me, of a quieter style. There have been — one of them, I am happy to think, still survives — in our generation three great giants of prose writing. There was, first of all, Carlyle, there was Macaulay, and there is Mr. Ruskin.² These are all giants, and they have the rights of giants. But I do not believe that a greater misfortune can befall the students who attend classes here, than that they should strive to write like any one of these three illustrious men. I think it is the worst thing that can happen to them. They can never attain to it. It is not everybody who can bend the bow of Ulysses, and most men only do themselves a mischief by trying to bend it. We are now on our way to a quieter style. I am not sorry for it. Truth is quiet. Milton's praise ever lingers in our minds as one of imperishable beauty, — where he regrets that he is drawn by I know not what, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies. Moderation and judg-

p. 58

¹ Letter to Bonmattei, from Florence, 1638.

² The characteristics of the styles of Macaulay and Carlyle are most thoroughly discussed in Minto's "Manual of English Prose Literature."

ment are more than the flash and the glitter even of the greatest genius. I hope that your professors of rhetoric will teach you to cultivate that golden art—the steadfast use of a language in which truth can be told; a speech that is strong by natural force, and not merely effective by declamation; an utterance without trick, without affectation, without mannerisms, and without any of that excessive ambition which overleaps itself as much in prose writing as it does in other things.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I will detain you no longer. I hope that I have made it clear that we conceive the end of education on its literary side to be to make a man and not a cyclopædia, to make a citizen and not a book of elegant extracts. Literature does not end with knowledge of forms, with inventories of books and authors, with finding the key of rhythm, with the varying measure of the stanza, or the changes from the involved and sonorous periods of the 17th century down to the *staccato* of the 19th century, or all the rest of the technicalities of scholarship. Do not think I condemn these. They are all good things to know, but they are not ends in themselves. The intelligent man, says Plato, will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and he will less value the others.

Literature is one of the instruments, and one of the most powerful instruments, for forming character, for giving us men and women armed with reason, braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage, and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue of which it has been well said that they are the brightest ornaments of the mind of man. Bacon is right, as he generally is, when he bids us read not to contradict and refute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and to consider. Yes, let us read to weigh and to consider. In the times before us that promise or threaten deep political, economical, and social controversy, what we need to do is to induce our people to weigh and consider. We want them to cultivate energy without impatience, activity without restlessness, inflexibility without ill-humor. I am not going to preach to you any artificial stoicism. I am not going to preach to you any indifference to money, or to the pleasures of social intercourse, or to the esteem and good-will of our neighbors, or to any other of the consolations and the necessities of life. But, after all, the thing that matters most, both for happiness and for duty, is that we should habitually live with wise thoughts and right feelings. Literature helps us more than other studies to this most

blessed companionship of wise thoughts and right feelings, and so I have taken this opportunity of earnestly commending it to your interest and care.

APPENDIX.

THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION MOVEMENT.

The purpose of the University Extension Scheme is to provide the means of higher education for persons of all classes, and of both sexes engaged in the regular occupations of life. It is in fact an attempt to solve the problem of how much of what the Universities do for their own students can be done for persons unable to go to a University. The fundamental idea throughout has been education for busy people.

It originated with the University of Cambridge. Subsequently, three or four years later, the "London Society for the Extension of University Teaching," was formed to carry on the work within the limits of the Metropolis, and a similar scheme was undertaken by Oxford. In addition to this the University of Durham is associated with Cambridge in this work in Northumberland and Durham, while in a tentative and informal way courses of lectures on the University Extension plan have been given during last year in connection with Owen's College, Manchester, and the Victoria Univer-

sity. Proposals are now being considered to form an inter-university extension scheme in Scotland in connection with all the Scottish Universities on the same line as the Cambridge scheme.

In the appended table statistics are given as to the work. The centres (including large towns, small towns, and even villages like the colliery villages in Northumberland) are associated into groups of three or four, and a lecturer is appointed to each group who lives in the district for the term, and gives a lecture a week at each of the centres under his charge. It is only by such co-operation of centres that sufficient work is secured to provide adequate remuneration for lecturers.

One of the chief characteristics of the system is the method of teaching adopted in connection with it. It has been concisely described as follows by a student who had attended the lectures for several terms: "Any town or village which is prepared to provide an audience, and pay the necessary fees, can secure a course of twelve lectures on any subject taught in the University, by a lecturer who has been educated at the University, and who is specially fitted for lecturing work. A syllabus of the course is printed and put into the hands of students. This syllabus is a great help to persons not accustomed to note-taking. Questions are given on each lecture, and written answers can be sent in by any one, irrespective of age or sex. All the lectures, except the first, are preceded by a class, which lasts about an hour.

In this class the students and the lecturer talk over the previous lecture. The written answers are returned with such corrections as the lecturer deems necessary. At the end of the course an examination is held, and certificates are awarded to the successful candidates. These lectures are called University Extension Lectures."

There can be no question that a great awakening of the intellectual life of the working classes is taking place, which has been much assisted and fostered in the north of England by the University Extension Scheme. The proofs of this mental awakening are abundant and unmistakable. The Northumberland miners have for several years, under great difficulties, obtained courses of University lectures on Political Economy, History, Mining, Geology, and other subjects. These courses have been given at twelve mining centres. The aggregate attendance in one session was about 1,400, which means one in seventeen of the entire population. Many of the students walked miles along bad roads, after dark and in all sorts of weather, in order to attend the lectures, and some of them made pecuniary sacrifices in order to secure these educational advantages. Although mention is made here of the artisan class, the majority of the students who have attended the lectures have been busy people of the middle classes, especially tradespeople, clerks and teachers in schools.

TABLE

Showing the present position of the University Extension Movement in England, the figures being for one year and taken from the last published Reports.

	No. Centres.	No. Courses.	Tot. No. Lectures given.	No. Lecturers empl'd.	Am't paid to Lecturers in 1885-86.
¹ Cambridge . . .	47	80	944	19	£2804 4 2
Oxford	22	29	175	13	528 12 6
London Society for the Extension of University Teaching	31	60	696	25	1690 9 5
In informal connection with Owen's College and the Victoria University . . .	5	6	42	4	150 0 0
	105	175	1863	61	£5173 6 1

¹The University of Durham is associated with Cambridge in the work in Northumberland and Durham.

The Cambridge and Oxford figures are for the year ending June, 1886, and are considerably larger for the session of 1886-87.

HINTS ON THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER TO
THE "LANDMARKS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE"

BY HENRY J. NICOLL

AUTHOR OF "GREAT MOVEMENTS."

The time which most people are able to devote to literature proper is very limited; and if second or third rate authors are read by them, the result must inevitably be that first-rate authors will be neglected. "Always in books keep the best company," wrote Sidney Smith to his son with his usual good sense. "Don't read a line of Ovid till you have mastered Virgil, nor a line of Thomson till you have exhausted Pope, nor of Massinger till you are familiar with Shakespeare." It is very obvious that those who read Pollok's "Course of Time" while remaining ignorant of Milton's "Paradise Lost," or the writings of "A. K. H. B.," while neglecting Bacon's "Essays" and Addison's *Spectator*, are guilty of a lamentable waste of time and misexpenditure of energy. "If you should transfer the amount of your reading day by day,"

says Emerson, "from the newspapers to the standard authors — but who dare speak of such a thing?" To expect people to give up newspaper-reading is certainly a very Utopian speculation, nor indeed, is it desirable in many respects that they should give it up. But it is a very easy and practical thing to obey the rule to study the best authors first, for it may be safely laid down as a general principle that the greatest works of our literature are also the most attractive. No dramatist is so readable as Shakespeare; to no works of fiction can we return again and again with greater pleasure than to the masterpieces of Fielding and Scott; nowhere can the blood-stained story of the French Revolution be followed with keener interest than in the pages of Carlyle.

Literature is a word often so loosely applied, that it may be well at the outset to define exactly what we mean by it. By people in general it is used with a very wide range of meaning. Milton's "Paradise Lost" and Buchan's "Domestic Medicine;" Rhymer's "Foedera" and Macaulay's "History of England," are ranked under the same all-embracing name. But literature rightly so termed is a word of much narrower signification. To entitle anything to be classed as literature, it must be so written that, apart from the mean-

ing conveyed, its mere style shall be such as to give pleasure. Neither wealth of information nor depth of thought gives a work a right to be called literature unless the information and the thought be attractively expressed. From this it is clear that many books, otherwise of great merit, have no claim to consideration in a literary history. A plan of a country may have more practical utility than the most beautiful landscape ever painted, but as it lacks the essential element of beauty, it will not be placed in the same category. In like manner many books which we could very ill afford to dispense with, being destitute of attractiveness and distinction of style, have no value viewed merely as literature. The true literary man is an artist, using his words and phrases with the same felicity and care as a painter uses his colors; and whoever aspires to win literary fame must pay the closest attention not only to *what* he says, but to *how* he says it.

De Quincey, whose speculations on such subjects are always ingenious and worth attending to, if sometimes over-refined and far-fetched, in one of his essays¹ lays down a distinction, first suggested by Wordsworth, which bears upon what we have been saying. As De Quincey's critical

¹ Originally published in *North British Review* for August, 1848, article on Pope.

writings are not so generally read as they should be, we may quote part of his remarks, "In that great social organ, which collectively we call literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices, that may blend, and often do so, but capable severally of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is first the literature of *knowledge*, and secondly the literature of *power*. The function of the first is to *teach*; the function of the second is to *move*. The first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasures or sympathy. . . . What do you learn from 'Paradise Lost?' Nothing at all. What

x do you learn from a cookery-book? Something new, something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery-book on a higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*, that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, when every pulse and each separate

A cookery-book is not 'literature'.

influx is a step upwards — a step ascending as from a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth. . . . All the literature of knowledge builds only ground nests, that are swept away by floods, or confounded by the plough; but the literature of power builds nests in ærial altitudes of temples sacred from violation, or of forests inaccessible to fraud. *This* is a great prerogative of the *power* of literature; and it is a greater which lies in the mode of its influence. The knowledge of literature, like the fashion of this world, passeth away. An Encyclopædia is its abstract; and, in this respect, it may be taken for its speaking symbol, that before one generation has passed, an Encyclopædia is superannuated, for it speaks through the dead memory and unimpassioned understanding, which have not the *rest* of higher faculties, but are continually enlarging and varying their phylacteries."

In the preceding extracts, as will be seen, De Quincey uses the phrase "literature of knowledge" to express that class of writings to which the term literature cannot, as he himself afterwards says, be with propriety applied — writings the sole aim of which is to convey information without any effort after beauty of style; and the phrase "literature of power" to express that class of writings — fiction and poetry

Literature of knowledge

—of which the object is, not to instruct, but to move the feelings and to give pleasure, and of which, therefore, attractiveness of style is an essential characteristic. But, as he himself says in a note, a great proportion of books — history, biography, travels, miscellaneous essays, etc. — belong strictly to neither of these two classes. Macaulay's "History of England" contains a vast amount of information, but it is not its stores of information which have attracted to it millions of readers; it is the fascinating style in which the information is conveyed, making the narrative as pleasing as a novel, and giving some passages a power of exciting the emotions which not many poems possess. And though to instruct be not the prime function of the novel or the poem, a great fund of instruction as to morals and manners is embodied in almost all good poems and novels. Shakespeare abounds in pithy aphorisms as to the conduct of life, which have become part of the moralist's stock-in-trade; Scott, in the "Heart of Midlothian" (to give only one example out of many), preaches a very effective homily on the evil consequences of giving up inward peace of mind for the sake of outward grandeur; and such writers as Thackeray and Miss Austen have done much to make people ashamed of angularities and affectations of manner.

So that De Quincey's distinction, though true in a wide sense, and ~~very~~ suggestive in many ways, is not ~~to be accepted as~~ absolutely correct. All literature worthy of the name is "literature of power," but it may be, and very often is, "literature of knowledge" also.

Having defined what literature is, we now proceed to consider the way in which its study may be most profitably pursued. In order fully to comprehend any author's work, and to place him in his true position among his fellows, not only must his writings be studied with due care, but he must pay regard to his outward "environment" and to the circumstances of the times in which he lived. Sainte Beuve, the prince of French critics, in all his inquiries made it a rule before studying the *author* to study the *man*, thinking that "as the tree is so will be the fruit." He was of opinion "that so long as you have not asked yourself a certain number of questions and answered them satisfactorily — if only for your own private benefit and *sotto voce* — you cannot be sure of thoroughly understanding your model, and that even though these questions may seem to be quite foreign to the nature of his writings. For instance, what were his religious views? how did the sight of nature affect him? what was he in his dealings with women

and in his feelings respecting money? was he rich, was he poor? what was his regimen? what was his daily manner of life? etc. Finally, to what vice was he addicted or to what weakness subject? for no man is entirely free from such. There is not one of the answers to these questions that is without its value in judging the author of a book, or even the book itself, if it be not a treatise on pure mathematics, but a literary work into the composition of which some of the writer's whole nature has perforce entered." The practise which now prevails of publishing full and authentic memoirs of celebrities, if perhaps not unobjectionable in some respects, is certainly an incalculable gain to the fruitful and intelligent study of literature. If we were so fortunate as to find a Life of Shakespeare similar to that which Boswell wrote of Dr. Johnson, can any one doubt that it would throw an immense light upon the many literary puzzles which are to be found in his writings, and which have perplexed generations of commentators and evoked hundreds of volumes? How many ingenious and elaborate studies on "Hamlet" would be shown to be as the baseless fabric of a vision? how many passages which verbal critics have (as they thought) proved to demonstration not to have come from Shakespeare's pen would

be claimed as his? how, perchance, every one of the theories about the Sonnets would crumble into dust, never again to be mentioned but with laughter after their mystery had been unveiled by unimpeachable evidence ?

Again, to take a case from our own time, how would we explain the gloomy pessimism of the latter writings of Carlyle as contrasted with the sanguine optimism of Macaulay if no records of his life were to be found, and we were compelled to judge of him by his works alone? Carlyle's temperament, no doubt, was naturally gloomy, but that fact alone would not be a sufficient solution of the enigma. But when we study the story of his life, and learn how he was constantly tormented by ill-health; how, eagerly ambitious of literary fame, he had to toil on for many a long year unnoticed and unknown, with bitter experience of that deferred hope which makes the heart sick; how, when the day of triumph came, it came so late that the flower of success had well-nigh lost its fragrance—then we have no difficulty in understanding the cause of his frequently dark and harsh views of human character and destiny. We need hardly dwell on the additional interest given to a book by a knowledge of the circumstances under which it was composed. Byron's poetry owes half its attrac-

tiveness to the fascination exercised by his singular and strongly marked personality. Johnson's works, excellent though some of them are, would now, we imagine, be very little read if Boswell's *Life* of him had not made him one of the best known, and (with all his eccentricities) one of the best-loved characters in our literary history. One's interest even in such a book as Gibbon's "*Decline and Fall*" is perceptibly quickened by the full and curious portrait of himself which he has drawn in his *Autobiography*.

But for the thorough and profitable study of an author, it is not enough that we know the circumstances of his private history; we must also make ourselves acquainted with the period in which his lot was cast. No writer, however great and original his genius, can escape the influence of the spirit of the age in which he lives; whether with or without his consent, his way of looking at things will be modified by the intellectual atmosphere by which he is surrounded. Literary men alike influence and are influenced by their time; and as no history of a country can be considered complete which ignores the influence exerted by its literature, so any literary history which ignores the currents of thought and opinion set afloat by political movements must necessarily be partial and

inadequate. There is no greater desideratum in our literature at present than a complete and able account of the history of English literature, in which the connection between the literary and political history of our country shall be fully dealt with; and it is very much to be desired that some one of sufficient talents and acquirements may be induced to undertake the task. He will have comparatively unbeaten ground to deal with. M. Taine, indeed, in his "History of English Literature," has done something in this direction; but his erratic brilliancy is not to be implicitly relied upon.¹ In periods of great national emotion, the influence exerted on literature by the powerful currents of thought and action sweeping on around it is so strong and so manifest that it cannot escape the notice of the most careless observer. The mighty burst of song in England during the reign of Elizabeth, a time of great men and great deeds, when new ideas and new influences were powerfully at work among all sections of society, has often been commented on. The impurity and heartlessness of the drama of

¹ NOTE BY AUTHOR.—It is not to the credit of England that the only full survey of its literature possessing any high merit from a purely literary point of view should be the work of a Frenchman. We have among us not a few writers, any one of whom, if they would abandon for a few years the practice, now unhappily too prevalent, of writing merely Review articles and brief monographs, could produce a work on the subject worthy of so great a theme.

the Restoration was a true type of the nation's wild outburst of revelry after its escape from the austere chains of Puritanism. Not so strikingly apparent, yet very noticeable, is the connection between the tortuous and shifty politics of the early years of the eighteenth century and the absence from the literature of that period of any high ideal or elevating principle. Coming nearer our own time, all are aware that the revolutionary movement of the close of the last century was active not only in politics but in letters; that as old laws and old principles were found inadequate to the needs of the time, so the literary forms and rules of the preceding generation were cast to the winds as quite incapable of expressing the novel ideas and imaginations of a race of writers who possessed little or nothing in common with their predecessors. But even in quieter times, when the broad river of national life is unruffled by violent storms, careful inquiry will make it apparent that its influence upon literature is very close and very real.

The most useful commentary on a great writer is to be found in the works of his contemporaries. It is mainly the service which they render in this direction that prevents one from agreeing with Emerson when he says that perhaps the human

mind would be a gainer if all secondary writers were lost. From an author's contemporaries we may learn what ideas in his time were, to use Dr. Newman's phrase, "in the air," and thus be able to gauge with some degree of accuracy the extent of his originality. We have all been taught that Shakespeare far outshone any of the brilliant constellations of dramatic stars which adorned the reign of Elizabeth; but this is only a barren phrase to us till we have studied the other dramatists of his time, and are thus in a position to realise what it really means. The writings of contemporaries, moreover, often help us to account for the flaws and deficiencies which not unfrequently occur even in authors of the highest class, by giving us a clue to the literary fashions which prevailed in their time. Shakespeare's tendency to indulge in puns and verbal quibbles, which mars some of his finest passages, was, no doubt, due not so much to any natural inclination as because he lived in an age extravagantly fond of such ingenuities; and even he, immeasurably great man as he was, proved unable to resist the contagion which spread everywhere around him. In this connection we should not omit to notice the valuable aid which writers destitute of original power, but with a faculty for assimilating the

ideas and imitating the style of others, often afford to the study of those whose voices they echo. Every great writer, while his popularity is at its height, is surrounded by a crowd of imitators, who copy in an exaggerated fashion his peculiar mannerism, and thus afford a very ready means of observing the minute traits of its style, and its little weaknesses and affectations, which might otherwise escape our notice. If imitation be the sincerest form of flattery, it is often also the bitterest satire. The severest critics of Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Swinburne have not so accurately shown the imperfections in the work of these writers, nor have they, it is probable, caused them so much pain as the verses of certain minor singers of our day have done. No parody is at once so scathing and so ridiculous as an attempt made by a writer of feeble powers to emulate the productions of a man of genius.

If ten men of literary culture were asked to write down the names of the thirty English writers (exclusive of authors of our own time) who are their greatest favorites, of whom they make as it were companions and friends, the lists, we may be sure, would differ widely. But if these ten men were asked to write down the names of the thirty English writers who occupy the highest rank, who are accepted as the

best representatives of our literature, the lists would probably resemble each other very closely. In the former case, single lists would contain names which were found in none of the others; in the latter case, it is very unlikely that any list would contain a name which was not also mentioned in several. "If I were confined to a score of English books," said Southey, "Sir Thomas Browne would, I think, be one of them; nay, probably it would be one if the selection were cut down to twelve. My library, if reduced to these bounds, would consist of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton; Jackson, Jeremy Taylor, and South; Isaac Walton, Sidney's "Arcadia," Fuller's "Church History," and Sir Thomas Browne;¹ "and what a wealthy and well-stored mind would that man have, what an inexhaustible reservoir, what a Bank of England to draw upon for profitable thoughts and delightful associations, who should have fed upon them." Some of the names in the above list will strike the reader as curious. Jackson, South, and even Fuller's "Church History" and Sydney's "Arcadia" are not books which can be ranked among general favorites. But Southey found in them the mental food best adapted to his constitution, and therefore pre-

¹ Doubtless from inadvertence, Southey mentions only eleven writers. Who the twelfth was, affords matter for curious speculation.

ferred them to others of greater intrinsic merit and much wider popularity. In books, as in other things, tastes differ very much. Not a few, whether they are honest enough to confess it or not, agree with worthy George III. in thinking that Shakespeare often wrote "sad stuff;" some people, by no means deficient in abilities, can read "Pickwick" without a laugh or even a smile; Macaulay, Mr. Trevelyan tells us, was so disgusted with the unconventional style of Ruskin and Carlyle that he refused even to look at their works.

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that when a young reader takes up a book which, he has heard, is enrolled in the list of English classics, he should not unfrequently find little in it to please him, and thus be tempted to think that it has been overrated. But if, as in the case we suppose, the book is one which has stood the test of time, he may be sure he is wrong. "Nature," writes Emerson "is much our friend in this matter. Nature is always clarifying her water and her wine; no filtration can be so perfect. She does the same thing by books as by her gases and plants. There is always a selection in writers, and then a selection from the selection. In the first place, all books that get fairly into the open air of the world were written by the successful class, by the affirming and advancing class, who utter

what tens of thousands feel though they cannot say. There has already been a scrutiny and choice from many hundreds of young pens before the pamphlet or political chapter which you read in a fugitive journal comes to your eye. All these are young adventurers, who produce their performances to the wise ear of Time, who sits and weighs, and ten years hence out of a million of pages reprints one. Again it is judged, it is winnowed by all the winds of opinion—and what terrific selection has not passed on it before it can be reprinted after twenty years—and reprinted after a century! It is as if Minos and Rhadaman, thus had indorsed the writing. 'Tis therefore an economy of time to read old and famed books. Nothing can be preserved which is not good." We might almost add that whatever has not been preserved is not good. Those whose duty or inclination leads them to wander in literary bypaths sometimes come across forgotten writers in whom they find a certain tone of manner or feeling which gives them, in their eyes, more attractiveness than is possessed by writers whose praises are echoed by thousands. But all attempts to resuscitate such books fail as utterly as attempts to lower the position of books which have been accepted as classical. The opinion of the majority of readers during many

years is better than that of any individual reader, or any small coterie of readers, however high their gifts or attainments may be.

It often happens that wider knowledge and culture leads one who at first was unable to recognize the merits of a classical author to see his error and acquiesce in the general verdict. In the case of our older authors, there are preliminary difficulties of style and language, which must, at the cost of some trouble, be vanquished before they can be read with pleasure. The practice of "dipping into" an author and reading bits here and there is productive of a great deal of literary heterodoxy. It is, for example, a not uncommon remark that articles, of which the writers are never heard of, but which are as good as any in the *Spectator* or *Tatler*, appear in our newspapers every day. No doubt there is a very large amount of talent now employed in newspaper-writing; nevertheless our average journalists are not Steeles or Addisons. The reason, in most cases, why newspaper articles are thought equal to the *Spectator* is because the former deal with *living* subjects, subjects which are interesting people at the moment, while the latter, having been written more than a century and a half ago, has an antique flavor about it. The *Spectator* cannot be appreciated but by those who, not content

with dipping into it here and there, have read at least a considerable portion of it, and thus gained such a knowledge of the manners and opinions which prevailed when it was written, as to be able to enter into the spirit of the work. A newspaper article referring to matters occupying the minds of all, may be perused with pleasure without any preparation.

But though increased knowledge and wider culture generally leads one to acquiesce in received opinions regarding the value of authors, they do not always do so. Every critic, however large his range and however keen his discernment, occasionally meets in with works of great fame of which he cannot appreciate the merit. He may, indeed, be able to perceive the qualities which cause others to admire them, but they are written in a vein which he cannot bring himself to like: the tone of sentiment running through them, or the style in which they are written, is repugnant to his nature. The fact that this is so, generally leads to a plentiful indulgence in what Mr. James Payn has so happily christened "sham admiration in literature." People praise books which they have never been able to read, or which they have only read at the cost of much labor and weariness, not because they like them themselves, but simply because they have heard others

praise them. It is melancholly to reflect how much of our current criticism upon classical authors is of this nature, consisting of mere windy rhetoric, not of the unbiassed and honest expression of the critic's real opinions. The practice is both an unprofitable and a dishonest one. Much more is to be learned from the genuine opinions of an able man, even though these opinions be erroneous, than from the repetition of conventional critical *dicta*. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" contain many incorrect critical judgments; but does any one suppose that the work would have been of more value if, instead of relating in manly and straightforward fashion the opinions of his own powerful, if somewhat narrow, understanding, he had merely repeated the "orthodox" criticisms on such writers as Milton and Gray? Even Jeffrey's articles on Wordsworth—those standing examples of blundering criticism—are much more useful and interesting to the intelligent reader than the thrice-repeated laudatory criticisms which are now so often uttered by countless insincere devotees of the poet of the Lakes. Every student of literature should make an honest effort to form opinions for himself, and not take up too much with borrowed criticism. Critical essays, books of literary history, books of select extracts, are all very use-

ful as aids to the study of great writers, but they ought not, as is too often the case, to be made a substitute for the study of the writers themselves. Infinitely more is to be learned from the reading of "Hamlet," than from the reading of a hundred studies on that drama. If, after having made a fair attempt to peruse some author whose works are in high repute, the reader finds that he is engaged in a field of literature which presents no attraction to him; that he is studying a writer with whom he has no sympathy, who strikes no respondent chord in his own nature; the best course for him is to abandon the vain attempt to like what he does not like, to admire what he really does not admire. Shakespeare's famous lines —

"No profit goes where is no pleasure ta'en,
In brief, sir, study what you most affect," —

convey thoroughly sound advice, provided, of course, that proper pains be taken to extend one's culture as widely as possible, and that opinions regarding the profitability or unprofitableness of studying certain authors be not formed without due deliberation. In the study of literature, as in other studies, interest advances as knowledge increases; very frequently books which to the tyro seem "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," are those which he afterwards comes to regard as

among his most cherished intellectual possessions.

A very attractive and instructive way of studying literature, is to select some great book or some great author as a nucleus round which to group one's knowledge of the writers of a period. If, for example, one studies that universally delightful book, Boswell's "Life of Johnson," and follows up the clues which its perusal suggests, a very competent knowledge of a large part of the literature of the eighteenth century may be acquired. Boswell's frequent cutting allusions to his rival, Sir John Hawkins, naturally induce us to read that worthy's Life of the "great lexicographer," in which, amid much trash and tedious moralizing, many curious and suggestive details are to be found. In a similar way his obvious dislike of Mrs. Piozzi draws attention to that lively lady's entertaining gossip; while the glimpses he gives of the life and conversation of most of the celebrated writers of the period, such as Burke, Goldsmith, Robertson, Hume, inspire us with a desire to become acquainted with their writings and with the particulars of their lives. Or if Pope be taken as the vantage-ground from which to survey the literary landscape around, how easily and pleasantly are we introduced to the acquaintance, not only of the greater

figures of the time, — Addison, Swift, Bolingbroke, Arbuthnot, and others, — but of the smaller fry, the ragged denizens of Grub Street, so mercilessly satirized in the “Dunciad.” No one can know Dryden thoroughly without picking up, almost imperceptibly it may be, an immense fund of information about the many curious literary products of the Restoration; and few more interesting literary studies could be suggested than, taking Shakespeare as a centre, to mark wherein he differed from his predecessors and contemporaries, how far he availed himself of what they had done, how far he influenced them, and how far he was influenced by them, and to trace the whole course of the Elizabethan drama from its first dim drawings to its melancholy but not inglorious close. When one has made oneself at home in the literature of any period, so as to be able to conjure up before the mind's eye its more important writers, even its minutest details, which in themselves seem trifling and tedious, acquire an interest and importance, every fresh particular adding a new shade of color to the mental picture we form of the epoch.

Literary history becomes much more interesting to most people the nearer it approaches to our own time; and very few are likely to acquire a taste for reading

by having their attention directed mainly to our older authors. Now, what every writer of a book like the present and every teacher of English literature ought to aim at is, to give his readers or his pupils a taste for literature. If the teacher of English literature fails in this, his labors are almost in vain. The amount of knowledge which he is able to communicate is comparatively small; but if he manages to impress on his pupils a sense of the greatness and importance of literature, and of the countless benefits and pleasures which may be derived from its study, he has sown the seeds of what will yet produce a very abundant harvest. The remark is very often made that young people are of their own accord likely to peruse writers of the day, while leaving the classical writers of former generations neglected. No doubt there is a good deal of truth in this; but I am disposed to question very much whether the practice of using mainly our older writers for educational purposes has any appreciable effects whatever in extending their general perusal; and when one considers how literature—even literature of the day—is neglected by numbers of educated people, one is inclined to have some doubt as to the wisdom of leaving recent writers out of the educational curriculum. Few will be disposed to deny

that the most important section of political history is that which relates to recent times. To a large extent, the same is true of literature. Nothing is more likely to quicken one's interest in books, and to serve as an incentive to further research, than an acquaintance with the various literary modes that have been prevalent in recent times or which are still in vogue. Moreover, if the study of English literature is pursued partly as a means of acquiring a correct style, there can be no doubt whatever that the prose writers of the last two centuries will prove much more useful guides than their predecessors. The following interesting remarks on this subject, quoted from a lecture "On Teaching English,"¹ recently delivered by Dr. Alexander Bain before the Birmingham Teachers' Association, appear to me to have much force, though the views expressed are perhaps rather extreme. "Irrespective of any question as to the superiority of Shakespeare and Milton, it must from necessity be the case that the recent classics possess the greatest amount of unexhausted interest. Their authors have studied and been guided by the greatest works of the past, have re-

¹ This lecture with other matter has been incorporated into a recent volume by Professor Bain, called "On Teaching English," with detailed examples, and an inquiry into the definition of poetry. This work is auxiliary to the enlarged edition of the author's "Rhetoric and English Composition."

produced many of their effects, as well as added new strokes of genius; and thus our reading is naturally directed to them by preference. A canto of 'Childe Harold' has not the genius of 'Macbeth,' or the second book of 'Paradise Lost,' but it has more freshness of interest. This is as regards the reader of mature years, but it must be taken into account in the case of the youthful reader also.

"So with regard to the older prose. The 'Essays' of Bacon cannot interest this generation in any proportion to the author's transcendent genius. They have passed into subsequent literature until their interest is exhausted, except from the occasional quiet felicity of the phrases. Bacon's maxims on the conduct of business are completely superseded by Sir Arthur Helps's essay on that subject, simply because Sir Arthur absorbed all that was in Bacon, and augmented it by subsequent wisdom and experience. To make Bacon's original a text-book of the present day, whether for thought or for style, is to abolish the three intervening centuries.

"Of Richard Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' another literary monument of the Elizabethan age, while I give it every credit as a work suited to its own time, I am obliged to concur in the judgment of

an authority great both in Jurisprudence and in English style—the late John Austin—who denounced its language as ‘fustian.’

“So much as regards the decay of interest in the old classics. Next as to their use in teaching style or in exercising pupils in the practice of good composition. Here, too, I think, they labor under incurable defects. Their language is not our language; their best expressions are valuable as having the stamp of genius, and are quotable to all time, but we cannot work them into the tissue of our own familiar discourse.”

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THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

A LECTURE

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF
ST. ANDREWS, MARCH 26, 1887

By LESLIE STEPHEN¹

I AM to speak of a well-worn topic, and I begin by saying that I do not propose to dwell upon one of its aspects. I shall not consider the proper place of English literature in our school and university studies. My reason is simply that I have not the practical experience which would enable me to pass beyond the ordinary commonplaces. I have more prejudices than reasoned convictions on that subject. I take for granted, indeed, as an undeniable proposition, that familiarity with our literature is desirable. It is desirable for us all to have the personal acquaintance of men

¹Leslie Stephen, the well-known English author and lecturer, was born in 1832, and educated at Cambridge. He was editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* from 1871 to 1882. He is now engaged in editing the "Dictionary of National Biography," a most thorough and comprehensive work in fifty volumes. Mr. Stephen is well-known by his "Hours in a Library" (3 series), "Life of Henry Fawcett," and several volumes in the "English Men of Letters series."

better, wiser, more highly endowed than ourselves. Acquaintance with such men is not less desirable after their death. In some respects it is even more desirable. The dead man cannot, it is true, answer our questions or thrill us by his bodily presence; but neither can he alarm our modesty or repel us by accidental infirmities. If we could consciously meet a Shakespeare, we should be struck dumb; but we are quite at our ease with that essence of Shakespeare which is compressed into a book. We can put him in our pockets, admit him to an audience when we are in the humor, and treat him as familiarly as a college chum. We can meet Dr. Johnson without the least fear that he will be personally rude, and stop Macaulay's excessive flow of information by simply shutting up his pages. The man may be only unfortunate who, in his youth, has not been stimulated by the personal acquaintance of some revered contemporary. He is more than unfortunate, he is blameworthy, if he do not make the acquaintance of some of the great men from Chaucer to Lord Tennyson, from Bacon to Carlyle, who speak to us across the gulf of time or from regions inaccessible to us in person.

The true object of the study of a man's writings is, according to my definition, to

make a personal friend of the author. You have not studied him thoroughly till you know the very trick of his speech, the turn of his thoughts, the characteristic peculiarities of his sentiments, of his imagery, of his mode of contemplating the world or human life. You should breathe a familiar atmosphere when you open his pages. If you meet a stray phrase of his it should ring in your ears with the accent of an old acquaintance; you should be able to swear to it as a part of his coinage. You should "have learnt his great language, caught his clear accents, made him your pattern to live and to die," and, I will venture to add, you should then have passed beyond this stage of idolatry—which is good as a phase, but bad as a permanent state of mind—into that of sane and reasonable appreciation. Addison, in an often quoted passage, ridicules the reader who wants to know whether his author is short or tall, black or fair. Perhaps such a demand is excessive; but I do not feel that I really know an author till I almost fancy that I should recognize him if I met him at a railway station. That indeed proves that I know very few; but it marks what is my own ideal. How, then, to attain such knowledge? I begin by replying, that before reaching the root of the matter there are certain auxiliary studies which

are obviously necessary and yet obviously external. They give the key, they do not lead us into the sanctuary. For example, one necessary preliminary is to learn our letters. But a bare power of reading does not take us very far. That part of our education was probably completed in our nurseries. In our nurseries also we generally suppose ourselves to have learnt the English language. Now it is thought superfluous to insist upon a study of the alphabet, but a good deal is said of the importance of that scientific study of language which acquires the more sounding title, philology. For the study of a foreign literature it is, of course, indispensably necessary to learn the language, and generally at a comparatively late period.

But for the study of English literature the question occurs whether we may not be presumed to have learnt more from our nurses than we shall ever acquire from our teachers. Philology is, of course, a most important and interesting study. An investigation of the great instrument of thought and of its processes of development has a genuine interest for philosophers, logicians, and even for historians and antiquarians, as well as for literary students. Philologists have to study the same documents as men of letters. They have to read Chaucer and Shakespeare,

though with a very different purpose. So a chemist may study a picture as well as an art critic. The main interest of the one is in the pigments to which it owes its color, as the main interest of the other is in the effect upon the imagination of a particular combination of colors. The philologist, as such, can tell you the history of a word used by Shakespeare, but as a philologist he has nothing to do with the imaginative force of the sentence in which the word occurs. So far as the language is obsolete, so far as it has become a dead language, he can do something for you. He can supplement the instruction which, as to the great bulk of the language, was already given in your nursery. Here and there he clears away an obscurity or points some allusion no longer manifest; and we will, if you please, be duly thankful to him, and tell him that he has rendered us a real service. But, however valuable for other purposes, we must admit that he is not a guide to the kind of knowledge which we desire, but an humble attendant who has cleared a few stumbling-blocks from our path.

There are other studies which make greater claims, and of which I must speak more fully. Literature is made up of words. It is a combination of raw materials which are all to be found in the

dictionary. But it is, as we know, a combination governed by peculiar laws of its own. To study those laws scientifically must, therefore, it is urged, be an essential aim of the literary student. The historical method is now in the ascendant. It affects not only history in the old sense, but philosophy, political and social theory, and every other branch of inquiry which has to do with the development of living beings. No one would assert this more emphatically than I should do. One corollary is that we should study the history of our own literature, that we should not only trace it back to its origin in our own islands, but also to the great foreign literatures which have had so profound an influence upon our own. Especially, it is urged, no one can appreciate English literature without a knowledge of classical literature. You cannot, says one authority, fully estimate Chaucer unless you are familiar with Virgil, Statius, and Ovid.

No one, says Mark Pattison, can follow Milton fully unless he has had at least a taste of Milton's training; that is, some knowledge of the authors whom Milton, we may not say plundered, but turned to account in every page of his poetry. The statement is not only plausible, but owes its plausibility to the fact that it contains a most important truth. Undoubtedly the

sympathetic study of ancient master-pieces is a most admirable training for the literary student. Really to appropriate the great writers of Greece or Rome is to acquire a valuable possession. It is a great thing to know how the real masters take hold of a subject, in order to feel the vast difference between the great creative genius and the mere man of talent. The great classical works have an advantage not only as being recognized masterpieces, but as being foreign. To know them is to recognize genius amongst unfamiliar shapes and surroundings. As an hour in Calais will put more fresh knowledge into your minds than a month in London, simply by making you realize that there are countries where babies talk French, so excursions into the wide expanse,

Which deep-browed Homer ruled for his demesne,

enables you to get rid of insular prejudices. It is a training in the art of recognizing the essential quality of genius apart from the local and temporary accidents which go so far to determine our taste in ordinary cases. I would emphatically assert the advantages of classical study—if any one disputed it—all the more ungrudgingly, I hope, because my own acquaintance with the classics is limited. But I shall not be therefore deterred from observing that even this study may be so conducted as to

degenerate into mere cram. The average schoolboy gains little when he holds Latin to be an instrument of torture invented by some prehistoric Keate or Busby, and is painfully drilled into construing *arma*, the arms; *virumque*, and the man; *cano*, I sing. Nay, such men have been observed as the more scholarlike pedant who can unravel every crabbed passage in the most corrupt fragment of a Greek play, but has only learnt, like Thackeray's Bardolph, to despise everybody who can't put a slang song into Greek iambics or turn a police report into the language of Thucydides.

I have known many classical scholars, of whom I can safely say that they excite my envy, because I can perceive how much their taste in modern has been refined and elevated by their study of ancient literature. But I have also, to be quite frank, known one or two who have only become better trained schoolboys, and have become more finical and pedantic without any perceptible improvement of their powers of appreciating literature. From which I only infer that it is possible even to learn Latin and Greek in a sense — in such a sense as to be a formidable competitor in an examination, and yet to gain a very poor training indeed. Such a man acquires something. He has the

power of explaining allusions or producing parallel passages. He can track Milton in his appropriations, or say how many Greek poets have anticipated Gray's remark about the rose which wastes its sweetness in the desert air. It is not only amusing but instructive to hunt out the curious coincidences of thought or phrase in great poets, or to see how a great writer makes his own of what he borrows. But the power of answering one of the stock examiners' questions, "explain the allusions in this passage," is consistent with complete insensibility to the merits of both passages. How far does such knowledge really aid your appreciation? Opening Milton at random, I find that the passage describing Satan,

His spear, to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast
Of some great ammiral, were but a wand,

may imply recollections of the "Odyssey," of the "Æneid," and of Tasso. The commentator is also good enough to tell us that there are many pines in Norway. Does the passage sound any the better or the worse? Pattison told us that only those classically trained could follow Milton. It is only such persons, I fully agree, who catch the full Miltonic aroma. But if I were asked to name some one whose soul would really ring like an echo to the majestic language of the great Puritan, I

think that my mind, and the minds of a good many of us, would spontaneously recur to the name of one who has told us that he knows little Latin and no Greek — I mean Mr. John Bright. He cannot, he says very frankly, and it is a misfortune for him, appreciate Plato. But that defect is clearly compatible with unequalled mastery of some of the noblest strains of English eloquence, and it would be incredible that a man who can use the instrument so skilfully should not appreciate its use by others.

When, indeed, I am told that a knowledge of classical literature is not only most desirable, but even essential to a full appreciation of the modern literatures, I cannot but think that there is a gap in the logic. How do you learn to appreciate either? I know a lady of remarkable beauty; I am told and I believe that she inherits the beauty from her grandmother. Do you imagine that I enjoy the sight of her beauty the less because I had not the happiness to know her grandmother? The knowledge of the fact is interesting to me as an humble disciple of Mr Darwin; it is a case of "heredity," and therefore relevant to a scientific inquiry. Similarly, if I wish to explain how English literature comes to have certain peculiarities, I must know the sources from which it is derived.

But after all there is a vast difference between what is called knowing a thing's history and really knowing the thing itself, between really having an ear for music and knowing how, for example, modern harmony has grown out of strumming on some prehistoric barbarous tomtom. No amount of such knowledge will give you the ear; nor will any knowledge of the relations between English and classical literature of itself endow you with the true faculty for perceiving the beauties of either. We cannot honestly deny the fact that many of our greatest writers owed little or nothing to any classical training, even when they possessed it. It is enough to run over the bare names of Shakespeare and Bunyan and Defoe and Burns and Dickens, to say nothing of many less distinguished. Cobbett wrote incomparably better English than Dr. Parr, and Mr. Bright has a style very superior to—I will not give a name. Criticism requires a wider knowledge though less genius than original authorship; but I cannot discover that our finest critic of some of the most important English literature—I mean Charles Lamb—owed anything to his scanty scholarship. *for his*

Admitting, then, most heartily the great value of a genuine study of classical literature, I yet am forced to regard it

rather as one of the studies by which our tastes may be improved and our perceptions refined than as an indispensable mode of training. There is one other kind of study upon which I may spend a word or two. Recent critics, I observe, are fond of dwelling upon what they call the "form" as distinguished from the "content" of poetry, and are given to insist that the important question is not what a man says, but how he says it. I will not diverge into a discussion of this statement, which like many others may, as I hold, be true and important, or very much the reverse according to our interpretation of its precise meaning. I will only note that, on one acceptation, it amounts to recommending the most barren and mechanical study as the only genuine study. You are, it is sometimes suggested, to study a poet's metres and neglect his meaning. The difference between successive schools of poetry is not in the sentiments which they express, but in the mechanism by which they contrive to express them. And thus a literary revolution is explained like a revolution in the practical sciences. Somebody invented a new scheme of versification as somebody invented a new application of steam or electricity. To which I shall only say that the metrical systems and so forth

which appear in different periods are undoubtedly worth study, and here, as everywhere, so far as the knowledge is useful, we should be careful to have accurate knowledge. But it is a palpable mistake, as I think, to speak of such changes as a cause instead of a symptom. If Pope preferred a smooth and monotonous system of verse to the rougher but more varied versification of his predecessors, the fact is to be noted, but not to be assigned as an explanation. The system of Pope was not due to an invention of ten-syllabled couplets, as the change in weaving was due to Arkwright's invention of the spinning-machine. It came when it was wanted. It was wanted when a new order of thoughts and feelings had to be expressed. The new order of thought and feeling was not created by the new mechanism, but determined its adoption. The literary revolution, to which we give the name of Wordsworth or Coleridge, was no more caused by the invention of a new literary fashion than the great political revolution by the abandonment of wigs and laced coats. Wigs and laced coats went with other things of more importance as men's social and political and religious instincts underwent a change; and the minor change, too, is worth noting as a symptom. But to treat the symptom as the cause, or to sup-

pose that the external changes can be studied to any purpose without reference so the underlying causes to which they were due, is to miss the whole significance of literary or any other kind of history.

And this leads to a further inquiry. Where are we to look for the real significance of such changes? Literature may be considered in two ways. A book is the utterance of an individual mind. It is the *sic cogitavit* of a Francis Bacon, a William Shakespeare, or an Alexander Pope. But it does not depend simply upon the individual mind. Every individual is a constituent part of a society. He transmutes as well as creates. He utters his own thoughts, but he is also the organ through which the spirit of the age utters its thoughts. He looks upon the world, but he is also, in part at least, a product of its development. His philosophy, the enthusiasms which stir him, the doubts which torment him, the answers which he supplies to them, the form in which he states the eternal problems and tries to utter a solution, are all in great measure determined for him by the social element in which he lives. This has become a commonplace. No one would now think that Shakespeare could be criticised fully without some knowledge of Elizabeth's time, or Pope without a knowledge of

of Anne's time, or Byron without a knowledge of the Revolutionary time. Literature in this aspect is simply one function of the social organism — if you will allow me to use the philosophical slang of the day — and any serious treatment of it must recognize the fact. } The greatest men, it is true, say what is of interest for all times ; but even the very greatest, the Homers and Dantes and Shakespeares, say it in the dialect and under all the conditions of their own time.

2. So far then as the study of literature can be — I will not say made truly scientific, for it is idle to speak of science in relation to the vague and tentative judgments which alone are possible now, but — treated in a scientific spirit, that is, examined impartially and placed in due correlation with all the truths known to us, it is essential to understand in some degree the time as well as the man, because only through the time can we fully understand the man. In this sense the special studies which I have mentioned are all in various degrees relevant ; they are useful auxiliary studies : the study of the language, of the forms of expression, of the previous literatures which have influenced our own, all call attention either to the symptoms or to the causes of important facts which we have to take into account.

But I think that we can see the importance of another kind of study still more intimately connected with our aims. Let me try to show how, as I conceive, it may be of real assistance, even at the price of repeating some very familiar truths. You should, I say, understand the spirit of the age, and by that I do not mean that you should study what is called the philosophy of history. There is, indeed, no more fascinating study; but, in the first place, the doctrines which it announces are still the guesses of clever men rather than the established conclusions of scientific observers; and, in the next place, true or false, they are abstract theories, not concrete pictures. What you require is not a clever analysis, but a vivid representation of the period. You should see it, not be full of formula about it. An architect upon glancing at an old building can tell you to what century or to what generation it belongs. When you turn over a book you should possess the instinct which enables you to give a shrewd guess as to whether, for example, it was written before or after 1760, in the days of George II. or of George III.

If, now, you were studying the period of which Dryden was the literary autocrat, I believe that few bits of reading would give you more real help than that

admirable third chapter of Macaulay's history which with all its faults, gives the most graphic and picturesque account of English society at the time. Or, if you go to contemporary documents, nothing would enable you to construct such a picture for yourself as the diaries of Pepys or the memoirs of Grammont ; or, if I may mention a favorite book of my own, the volumes of the State trials which deal with that period. Nothing enables you to see so clearly the various heterogeneous elements of which society was then composed, and to understand what was the audience whose tastes Dryden considered in every line that he wrote, the great seminal thoughts which were then fermenting and struggling for utterance, and the imagery which typified them most completely, as the documents which bring before you the men themselves, with all their hopes and fears and beliefs and doubts and passions. If English literature is more intelligible when read in conjunction with the classics, I certainly hold that our understanding is still more improved by reading it in conjunction with English history. To explain myself more clearly, let me take a particular instance. Suppose, for example, that you wish to study Pope, who, of course represents a most important moment in the development of

English literature. Some peculiarities of Pope's poetry are set out in every manual upon English literature. There is his famous theory of "correctness;" there are the limitations which he accepted or introduced into English verse, and the so-called conventionality which produced the so-called reaction of Wordsworth and his school; and it is, of course, necessary to know what were the peculiarities thus indicated and what was the history of their growth and decay. But if it be necessary to know this, it is necessary also to pass beyond this knowledge. Why did he adopt these canons of taste, and why did they so impress his contemporaries? No answer can be suggested from the bare facts themselves; you must feel the relation between the facts and the whole spirit of the time.

Pope, again, was, after a fashion, classical. Some of his best forms are his imitations of Horace; and his most popular was the translation of the "Iliad." Some critics indeed tell us that you will like Pope's "Iliad" better in proportion to your ignorance of Homer's "Iliad." We may grant, in spite of this, that the enjoyment of Pope is facilitated by a knowledge of Homer, and especially of Horace, to whom he had so close an affinity. Yet the question remains, why did Pope and his con-

temporaries venerate the classics? why, for example, did they use 'Gothic' as simply a term of reproach? what was the spirit of the age which led them to set so high a value upon the qualities which they recognized in classical literature? Unless we can give some sort of answer to such questions we must fail to perceive the significance of the facts we observe, or to enter really into the spirit of our author. To give an answer we must be able not merely to use the proper formula about certain analogies, but to transport ourselves at will to the first half of the eighteenth century.

Now, I shall not attempt any answer, but I shall try to indicate briefly how an answer should, in my opinion, be sought. There are, as I conceive, two main directions of study relevant to such an inquiry. We want to know something of the philosophy and, still more, something of the social conditions of the time. Pope's most ambitious, though not most successful work, is the 'Essay on Man.' The 'Essay on Man,' is a kind of cento from the popular writers upon philosophy of the day. It is full of passages taken almost bodily from such men as Samuel Clarke and Lord Shaftesbury and Leibnitz, and a great part of it seems to have been a versification of the prose in which Boling-

broke very rashly expressed his views of contemporary philosophy. Reading it without some knowledge of these doctrines is like reading modern literature without having heard of Darwinism. But the importance of such knowledge is not confined to this particular work, still less to the explanation of particular phrases or allusions. It is important because the whole tone of Pope's poetry is determined by his immersion in the speculations of the day. Why is it, for example, that whereas Milton sought to 'justify the ways of God to Man' by giving a concrete history of the great events which revealed the Divine purpose, Pope adopting the same phrase, and wishing to 'vindicate the ways of God to Man,' proceeds to versify a number of abstract arguments? The difference was imposed by the conditions of the time, by all the differences to which we refer when we say that Milton was a Puritan, and that Pope was what has been called a Christian Deist.

To understand that difference we must understand something of the philosophical history of the day, and unless we understand it we shall never appreciate the curiously didactic tendency which is one of the marked characteristics not only of the 'Essay on Man,' but of all Pope's best work, and of most of the best work

of the time, and which leads to its greatest fault, the confusion between the proper spheres of poetry and of logic. To perceive Pope's drift, to understand why he adopts modes of utterances which to us seem to be essentially prosaic, and to recognize the poet under the dealer in epigrams and commonplaces, we must know something of the intellectual revolution; of the immense breach which had taken place between the new philosophy and the old teaching of the schools; of the vast impressions upon the imagination as well as upon the reason of Newton's gigantic discoveries; of the change in the whole modes of reasoning involved in Locke's new departure; of the kind of deification of 'common sense' characteristic of the philosophy, of the theology, of the politics, and therefore also of the literature of the time. We must appreciate the aspiration expressed in Berkeley's famous verses for a time when men shall cease to impose for truth and sense 'the pedantry of courts and schools;' the aspiration which involved an appeal from learned recluses and monastics wrapped in mystery to the clear common sense of a circle of educated men. That spirit shows itself in all the men of the day—in Berkeley, in Addison, in Swift, in Shaftesbury, in Bishop Butler, in Bolingbroke, not less than

in Pope; and without some sense of that fact you will be at a loss to understand either the aims or the methods of Pope and his contemporaries.

Briefly, to understand the literature you must know something of the philosophy; and this, though pre-eminently true of a period like Pope's, where the absence of a clear distinction is a special characteristic, is more or less true of all periods. Between Shakespeare and Bacon, between Dryden and Hobbes, between Shelley and Godwin, between Scott and Burke, between Wordsworth's poetry and Coleridge's philosophy, there is more than a relation of contemporaneity. I do not mean, however, that any profound philosophical study is needed. Far from it. I only mean that you must have some such acquaintance with the general drift of thought as Pope himself possessed—which, to say the truth, was superficial enough—before you can fairly appreciate him, or cease to be repelled by some otherwise unintelligible peculiarities.

But still more necessary is a study which, in truth, is closely connected with this. The study of the philosophy is most intimately connected with the study of society. The philosophical movement was congenial to, if it was not due to, the peculiar conditions of society. No human

heing was ever more acutely sensitive to the opinions of the day than Pope. Nobody ever reflected more accurately the special phrases of the social life. The 'Rape of the Lock,' the 'Dunciad,' or the prologue and epilogue to the Satires, all his most undeniable successes, first take their true coloring when you know the people for whom they were written; when you have a clear vision of Queen Anne 'taking sometimes counsel and sometimes tea' at Hampton Court, quarrelling with the Duchess of Marlborough, and going to meet Harley at Mrs. Masham's; when you can elect yourself a member of Addison's 'little senate,' where Steele, listening reverentially over his cups, and Budgell and Tickell and namby-pamby Philips are sitting round in rapt admiration, or follow the great man to Holland House and watch him writing a 'Spectator' and revolving round two foci, each marked by a bottle of port; or sit up with Swift when he gets under his blankets on a cold night to scribble off the last events of the day to Stella, or meet the 'Brothers Club' at dinner to discuss the proper policy of the Tory ministry; or drive over with Pope himself in a chariot to sit with Bolingbroke under a hay-stack and talk bad metaphysics in a pasture painted with spades and rakes; or let his waterman row you up

from Westminster stairs to see his garden and present a crystal for his grotto, and talk to Gay and Swift till your host says, 'Gentlemen, I leave to your wine,' and leaves three of you to finish the pint from which he has deducted two glasses. You must follow him invisibly to his bed, where he will have paper and pens by his side, lest he should wake in the night, parturient of a couplet, and have no proper cradle ready for its reception. He will awake raging over some smart saying attributed to Lady Mary or Lord Hervey, and excogitate a stinging retort to be remembered at this day by all educated men, though nine out of ten may have forgotten its origin. Or perhaps he will add a tinge of bitterness to one of the passages in the 'Dunciad,' where he lashes his multitudinous foes, We should see them, too, poor wretches, far away in the recesses of Grub street, in the garret where the printer's devil finds them, robed in an old sack with holes for the passage of their arms, and desperately tearing their way through the translation of a French translation of a classic, with the help of a dictionary. Nor must we forget to see Pope on his best side; to see how his eye shines and his lip trembles when he turns a delicate compliment to an old friend; with what touching gentleness he fondles his old mother, as Wal-

pole sneeringly puts it, and wakes, perhaps, to write those exquisite verses which still show us what true feeling lurked in the deformed and spiteful little bundle of nerves :

Me let the tender office long engage
To rock the cradle of reposing age ;
With lenient arts, extend a mother's breath,
Make languor smile, and sooth the bed of death ;
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
And keep awhile one parent from the sky.

Carlyle could never write about a man till he had framed a credible portrait of his appearance. Macaulay used to ramble in the streets of London, trying to reconstruct a vision of the houses as occupied by the old generation so long vanished from sensible perception. To make some such picture as a background for our poet is, I hold, most essential for a clear appreciation. We shall understand the conditions under which Pope worked when we know the enemies, big and small, whom he dreaded, and upon whom he took vengeance ; the greater men whose approval he courted with genuine affection ; the critical circles, who revered him as an authority because he adopted and reflected their sentiments with unequalled skill. His best poetry is the incarnation of his and their conversation : the refined and elaborated essence by a man of genius, full of such epigrams as would tell with

men of the world, drinking at the coffee-houses or meeting for friendly suppers to polish their wits by collision; deficient in romance, for the romantic to such men suggested the ridiculous and the old-fashioned; teaching by direct precept rather than by imagery, for they cared nothing for the old mythology; embodying commonplaces, for the talk of such men avoided the depths and the raptures of poetry, and yet superabundantly keen, sometimes even profound in substance, though never seeking the profound at the risk of obscurity; and far more often really tender, though shy in openly repressing tenderness, and dreading sentimentality as the deadly sin. Feel this; see these men as they were, and so you will understand why Pope uttered himself in his characteristic fashion, and see the real power which was hidden under an unfamiliar mask.

And how to feel this? By reading some of the most delightful books in the language. By reading Addison and Swift, and Pope's own correspondence, and Lady Mary's letters, and 'Robinson Crusoe,' and 'Gulliver's Travels,' and Gay and Parnell, and a crowd of smaller writers, just as they come in your way. Of all books — but I speak professionally, for I refer to my own trade — none are more delightful

than good biographies.¹ I will not suggest that you should read a certain dictionary of biography,² because it is not yet finished, though when it is finished you will have, in fifty moderately thick volumes, a pretty full introduction to English literary history. But I do think that in the study of biography you are led by the pleasantest of paths into the fullest possession of that concrete picture of a man's surroundings which I should desire you to possess. I will take one example. Let me speak from my own experience. I had the good fortune, when a boy, to read what is to me, I will confess, the most purely delightful of all books—I mean Boswell's 'Life of Johnson.' I read it from cover to cover, backwards and forwards, over and over, through and through, till I nearly knew it by heart; and I should like nothing better than to read it again to-morrow. Just consider to what a circle you are introduced. There are the two main figures, forming a contrast in real life scarcely surpassable by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza—Johnson, physically,

¹ For a most admirable lecture on the charms of biography and its value to young people, see a lecture by Phillips Brooks published in volume of sermons, entitled "Sermons delivered at Phillips (Exeter, N. H.) Academy."

² Reference is made to the "Dictionary of National Biography," Edited by Leslie Stephens, twenty volumes of the fifty announced have been published.

✓ a giant deformed by disease and infirmity; intellectually, one vast mass of common sense and humorous shrewdness, masked by outrageous prejudices, and, morally, hiding a woman's tenderness and a hero's independence of spirit under the roughness of a street porter; a man who begins by disgusting you, who soon extorts your respect, and who ends by making you love him like a dear friend. And Boswell, the inimitable, who has something amiable in all his follies, even if I may say so, in his vices; whose vanity is redeemed by an unstinted and hearty appreciation of excellence which amounts to genius; with whom we sympathise because he lays bare so unsparingly weaknesses of his own, which, as our own conscience tells us, are not quite without certain corresponding germs in our own bosoms, who thus makes a kind of vicarious confession for us, which we enjoy though we would not imitate; whose indomitable gaiety, whose boundless powers of enjoying every excitement, even the excitement of confessing his sins and making good resolutions for the future, disarms all our antipathies — this unparalleled fool of genius attracts us as much as the master whose steps he dogged, and whose very foibles he copied.

And this delightful pair are only the centre of a circle. Boswell opens the door

to the whole literary history of the century. Johnson comes into contact in his youth with Pope and Swift, who had known the wits of Charles's days, and in his age with Hannah More, who made a pet of Ma-caulay, and with Miss Burney, who lived long enough to have made, if she had chosen, a pet of me. By friendship or hostility he touches all the great Englishmen of his time. Think only of three friends, of all of whom Boswell gives us the most intimate glimpses: Burke, incomparably the greatest writer upon political philosophy whom these islands have ever produced; Goldsmith, who 'touched nothing that he did not adorn,' author of some of the most exquisite poetry and of the most exquisite idyl of country life in our language; and Reynolds, the first of English painters, who still preserves for us the most admirable representations of his great contemporaries, and whose art seems to admit us to the most charming domesticities of the day, and might teach even women to find a new charm in infancy. These are only the most conspicuous figures in a gallery including so many eminent figures, and full of characteristic touches even when we have to do with their hostile encounters. We smile now at Johnson's judgments of Rousseau, whom he would have sentenced to transportation,

p. 25
" 102

and of Homer, whose philosophy he regarded as an illustration of the folly of trying to milk the bull when you are not satisfied with the cow. To know an epoch we want to know its prejudices as well as its new ideas, and of the most dogged prejudices we certainly find an ample crop in Boswell.

And where should we find a better illustration of the stalwart loyalty of the day than in Johnson's two famous interviews with George III. and with the arch-demagogue Wilkes—the last the very gem of Boswell's unsurpassable book. 'Johnson,' says Carlyle, 'was the last of the Tories.' In studying Boswell you will learn to know what that means. When you have read it you have had a glimpse both of the tendencies, social and intellectual, which were thus bringing on the revolution, and of that huge mass of manly, pig-headed, prejudiced, stupid, judicious, selfish, patriotic, invincible common sense which crushed for a time the revolutionist of England, though it was far indeed from exterminating the seeds of a profound revolution. You might go far to complete your study by reading two delightful, though curiously contrasted, collections of letters—the letters of the lovable recluse Cowper, who incidentally reveals what was fermenting in quiet

country circles, and the most admirable letters of the not too lovable Walpole, which will show you what was going on in circles which scarcely deigned to cast an eye upon Johnson. It will be set before you by an observer whom Macaulay chooses to ridicule as a fribble unworthy of serious attention, but who, if I be not greatly mistaken, had, beneath all his affectations, one of the keenest eyes of all his contemporaries, and who certainly wrote letters unsurpassable in the English language. If he had some of the failings generally attributed to the French, he had, what is far rarer, some of the high qualities which make the French unrivalled as memoir writers and correspondents.

Through such readings, I have said, you gain a vivid concrete picture of the men of the day. You will learn of the folly of the fashion, now dying out, of simply abusing the eighteenth century.¹ You will learn how many men then lived admirable domestic lives, how much there was of kindliness and good feeling, and sincere wish to grapple with the evils of the day. Such a study will help, as I have hinted, to a genuine appreciation of the political, the

¹ Read a vigorous article by Frederic Harrison on "A few words about the Eighteenth Century," in the *Nineteenth Century* for March, 1883, also to be found in Harrison's "Choice of Books," complete edition.

9.221

social, and the ecclesiastical movements of the time. And therefore by the same process it will enable you to enter into the literature—to understand Johnson's 'Vanity of Human Wishes' and 'Rasselas' and 'Lives of the Poets,' even, it may be, his 'Rambler,' which I admit is greatly in need of some shoeing-horn—to delight in Goldsmith's 'Traveller,' and 'Vicar of Wakefield,' to enjoy Gray's exquisite art, much as it was reviled by Johnson, at the same time that you will penetrate into the priceless treasure-trove of Burke's political wisdom, and even judge more wisely of Gibbon's monumental history, or of Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations.'

You may be inclined to say that I am making large demands. For a Macaulay or a Carlyle, who wish to present a complete picture of the whole complex life of a period, such reading may be desirable or necessary. But most of us have neither the portentous memory of Macaulay nor the imaginative intensity of Carlyle, nor the opportunity of poring over the old records till we can reclothe the dead bones of history. To this I reply, first, that the time required is not so very great. To read Boswell and Walpole and Cowper, to glance over a few old periodicals like the 'Gentleman's Magazine' and the 'Annual Register,' to read the regular histories of

the day, so as to have a skeleton map of dates and facts, requires no exclusive absorption in the study. A little leisure and a little enthusiasm will go a very long way. But I must next reply that study of this kind, like the others I have mentioned, is still in one respect not sufficient, and in another not necessary. It is not sufficient, because after all, what a man wants for the appreciation of books is not so much to have this or that kind of knowledge as to be a clever fellow and to have a sensitive nature. A great though misunderstood philosopher, called Dogberry, observed that 'to read and write comes by nature.' With proper limits, that aphorism, as applied to the reading or writing of books, is very sound. You want faculties which cannot be put into you, if they are absent, by any education, and which have a provoking way of asserting their existence—to the great confusion of education theorists—when they have received none of the orthodox pabulum. I don't want to say a word against education. If I did, indeed, I should probably be here in some personal danger. In reality, I only wish to argue on behalf of a wide and thorough education. But we ought, in honesty, to recognize one fact sometimes neglected. A good education for literary purposes is by no means

exclusively an education in literature. To appreciate Shakespeare you want something much more important than cramming with facts. To enjoy 'Romeo and Juliet' the best qualification is to be one-and-twenty (which is compatible with being also thirty or forty). To enjoy 'Hamlet' it is, perhaps, better to be, let us say, fifty-four. The education which comes through life, through the possession of certain passions and feelings, is the most important of all education. But, I hasten to observe, this does not tell against education in general, but only against a narrow education which fails to stimulate all our powers. The best way to learn military arts is not to be drilled in them from childhood, but to spend many childish hours in field sports and games which brace the nerves and sharpen the eyes. I will venture to say what may sound paradoxical.

Of all studies that which has the least in common with literary study is, I suppose, the study of mathematics. I will add that mathematicians are apt to acquire certain rather mistaken prejudices in literary matters. But if I were asked whether a young man would best fit himself for a literary career or for the study of literature by reading books about authors or by reading mathematics (supposing him to

have only time for one pursuit), I should unhesitatingly advise mathematics. Not, of course, that he will learn anything directly useful. He will never require to apply the binomial theorem to the criticism of 'Paradise Lost.' But an exclusive reading of mere criticism on literary history has a strong tendency to make a man a prig, to suppress all spontaneous and independent judgment, and to leave his general faculties undeveloped. A study of mathematics, on the other hand, has been, since Plato's days, the most admirable system of intellectual gymnastics ever devised; it braces and invigorates the mental fibre, it makes a man appreciate clear, vigorous, uncompromising reason, and familiarizes him with the most perfectly adequate expression of certain forms of thought. Therefore, though he has not the information required, though he has not learnt a single applicable truth, he has so far the advantage of coming to any study with vigorous faculty, with a trained perception for certain essential qualities of all good work, scientific and literary, and without being sworn to the special tenets of any little critical school. He will at least appreciate the cardinal virtue of clearness. I confess that I attach more importance to the judgment of a man of vigorous intellect tackling a new

book without any knowledge of previous critical dogmas than to the judgment of the professed critic of less vigor who utters his opinions in mortal fear of contradicting something that has been said by ~~Ste.~~ Beuve or Mr. Matthew Arnold.

And this brings me to the second point, that such training as I have suggested is not essential. I have tried to show, and it is my firm belief, that it is extremely useful, especially when combined with all other means of training. But I cannot conclude without also insisting upon the fact that even if it be not attainable there is still no reason why a man should not learn, within certain limits, to enjoy and appreciate the masterpieces of literature. This is rather a delicate subject, but I must seek very briefly to explain what I think. There is an old controversy as to the relative value of the critical and the vulgar judgment of books. At times, as in the familiar cases of Bunyan and Defoe, the vulgar have forced the critics to accept their verdict. At times the critical few have recognised merit which has only by degrees won acceptance with the multitude. The critics, like the vulgar, have special weaknesses and prejudices which often obscure their judgment. Without arguing the point, I am content

to observe that, in my opinion, lasting success with either class is enough to prove merit, and that, in any case, the fact that the ignorant have sometimes had the best of it is enough to prove that an ignorant person may have a sound judgment. He has the great advantage of spontaneity—of admiring a thing because it affects him, not because he has been told that he ought to admire it.

To preserve this spontaneity in all our judgments should be one of our very first objects, however much training we may undergo. Sincerity in such matters is of the very essence of all sound opinion. There are, I think, two rules in this matter. Never persuade yourself that you like what you don't like; not if it be 'Faust' or 'Hamlet,' or the 'Divina Commedia,' or the 'Iliad.' Sham liking is far worse than honest stupidity. But, again, do not presume to think that your dislike to an accepted masterpiece proves it not to be a masterpiece. The chances are a thousand or a million to one that you are wrong, and not all the generations which have accepted them. If Shakespeare was not a poet, Shakespeare's influence is as great a mystery as would be the elevation of Vesuvius without volcanic energy. Confess, therefore, your incapacity, and by all means confess it frankly,

but do not parade it as a discovery. Try again, and see if Shakespeare will not improve. If he doesn't, try to explain why he has impressed other people, and calculate the chances of its being due to their folly or to your obtuseness.

But can we in any case expect a genuine appreciation without preparatory training—without knowing the history of a book, the age in which it was produced, the parallel phenomena in other literatures, and so forth? To that question I think that an answer may be suggested by one fact which is tolerably familiar to you here, and which I mention with all due reserve. You have all read 'Old Mortality.' You are acquainted with Mause Headrigg and Ephraim Macbriar and Balfour of Burley. Each of those admirable types of the old Covenanters is familiar, beyond the familiarity of mere literary students, with the one book which to many Scots in their rank of life has been the whole of literature, and the study of which was the only preparatory study for one of the masterpieces of our language, the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The Bible is read by millions who know hardly any other book, and who know and care nothing for any auxiliary study. To them, of course, it is something far more than a mere literary study. But do they or do they not

appreciate, for example, the Psalms of David — not simply as inspired documents, but as exalted poetry? If I may take Scott's judgment, as represented in such characters as Mause Headrigg or Davie Deans, the answer is not perfectly simple. Such people, he would obviously say, managed to find what they sought; the phrase about smiting the Amalekite hip and thigh suited them better than the precept of turning the second cheek; they found a pattern in Jael's treatment of Sisera, and somehow failed to pay equal attention to the parable of the Good Samaritan. And, moreover, Scott would have said, or we may certainly say for him, that their views of history would not have been those of the most judicious inquirers, and that they had very erroneous opinions as to the circumstances and times under which the Old and New Testaments were composed. Yet as evidently they were profoundly influenced by their studies; the Biblical language and history had entered into their very souls; and the narrative which they revered, the Psalms which became their battle-cry, had no small share in generating that heroic courage under torture and defeat which Scott, with all his Cavalier prejudices and all his abhorrence of Jacobinism, cannot help recognizing, as a chivalrous

antagonist, amongst the persecuted Covenanters.

Now, making all due corrections, we may, I think, deduce from this instance some of the limitations and merits of untrained reading. The man who reads 'without note or comment,' trusts to his own unaided sagacity, and makes no auxiliary studies, has undoubtedly some enormous disadvantages. He will be liable to error if he reasons upon the books he loves as historical documents; for, of course, it is essential in that view to know all that can be known of the time and conditions of authorship. He will be liable to blunder if he speaks as a critic; he may cite as proofs of original genius what is manifestly borrowed, and entirely misconceive the true relations of his favorite books to other literature. Lamb, who read the English drama as a lover, who entered into its spirit as no one has done, and interprets it with unrivalled felicity, only illustrated his own want of knowledge when he ventured upon asserting the superiority of Marlowe's 'Dr. Faustus' to Goethe's 'Faust.'

The simple reader, again, who reads like Lamb, is specially likely to read into books where he should read out of them; to attribute to the authors his own thoughts, and to find edification like the proverbial

old lady in the blessed word 'Mesopotamia' — to confound between an author's meaning and the thoughts which he accidentally suggests. To be fair, we should perhaps add that the most ignorant of critics can hardly excel some philosophical commentators in this respect — German critics of Shakespeare, for example. But for mere literary purposes this failing is of less importance than the opposite error — the error of leaving out instead of adding; the ignorant reader not only misses special allusions to facts or to previous writers, but frequently a writer's whole drift: the covert satire which is really the vitalising salt of an epigram; the political or philosophical inference which is suggested instead of bluntly stated; he fails to perceive the intensity of passion which burns under a studiously compressed manner, or the sagacity which pierces some current sophism by the assertion of some obvious truth now looking like a commonplace; and he is kept at a distance by some mannerism or conventional mode of speech which really only lies on the surface. Shakespeare's Ulysses speaks of that 'touch of nature which makes the whole world kin,' that

With one consent praise newborn gauds,
Though they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o'erdusted.

We all more or less suffer from the illusion which leads us to value the coinage, not in proportion to its intrinsic value, but to the gloss of novelty and to the modernness of the image and superscription. It is the common error, in short, which makes us prefer the last volumes from the circulating library to Scott or Fielding, or to regard the last leading article as eclipsing Junius or even the 'Letters on a Regicide Peace.' It is right, indeed, as well as almost inevitable, that we should be more interested by our contemporaries than by writers of the past; but it is undesirable, it is indeed fatal to true literary appreciation, that we should be deluded by this error of intellectual perspective into misconceiving the true magnitude of the fixed stars of literature when we are blinded by the meteors of to-day. And this is precisely the main use of those auxiliary studies of which I have spoken. Since the great men lose some influence by not being our contemporaries, we must be able to make ourselves their contemporaries; to get rid of this common illusion; to overcome an obstacle which, though often trifling in itself, may frequently generate a complete incapacity for perceiving the true relations of things, and permanently withhold from us possessions which, when we have once made a little

effort, become invaluable. It is briefly the function of such study to rub off the dust which makes the gold less attractive than the base metal gilt.

In this sense, the use of such studies, however great, is yet negative. They remove a film from our eyes, but cannot of themselves give us eyesight. The reading of the ignorant man has often the superlative advantage, that it is a reading of love. The greatest writers show their power in nothing more than this, that they put so much inextinguishable fire into their work that even at the distance of centuries, with all the disadvantages of unfamiliar language and unintelligible allusions, and half unintelligible purpose, the glow can be felt beneath the drift and accumulation of centuries by men who are congenial in soul though unprepared by culture. Keats could feel the charm of Homer through the translation of Chapman, though Chapman had been dead for two centuries and Homer belonged to an almost prehistoric world. The Psalms of David, I have said, stir millions who have no preparatory knowledge except of their own language. And frequently a man can wrestle and struggle into a perception of the essential meaning and beauty of a great author with surprisingly little training. But, as a rule, such a feat can only

be achieved by men of abnormal intelligence. Judicious training can greatly diminish the impediments which keep at bay all but the keenest intelligence, and help to complete the knowledge and strengthen the perceptions even of the keenest. Most of us are absolutely in need of it, and every one may be helped by it. Yet that is not enough unless the patient can also minister to himself; unless he has that intense appetite for the study which will sometimes overcome all apparent obstacles, though it will be the keener when the obstacles are removed. To teach so as to stimulate that appetite and not to quench it by irrelevant cram is the great problem for the teacher. And therefore I will add one corollary: as a rule, the best way of beginning the study of literature is to read that book which you can read with pleasure, or, if possible, with enthusiasm. I will not say — I wish I could — that there are no mischievous books. But (making obvious deductions) I am quite ready to accept with Gibbon the 'tolerating maxim of the elder Pliny' that there is hardly any book from which you cannot derive some good. I am convinced that no reading is good which is not in some degree reading with an appetite. I am almost ready to invert the maxim, and to say that all reading with an appetite is necessarily good.

Some distinguished men have recently been amusing themselves with the insoluble problem, Which are the best hundred books?¹ I say insoluble, because to my mind the best book for any man is that in which he takes most interest; and as men's powers and tastes vary indefinitely, and there is no power and no taste which may not be stimulated by reading, so the suitability of books depends upon the idiosyncrasy of the reader. One man prefers metaphysics and another poetry; one is a devourer of novels and another of biography, and a third of travels, and a fourth of history, and a fifth of antiquarian research, and a sixth of theological controversy, and a seventh of politics; one likes the classics and another Oriental or modern English literature; one is an enthusiast for Scott, and one for

¹ "You hear a great deal nowadays of the worst nonsense ever uttered since men were born on earth. Best hundred of books! Have you ever yet read one good book well? For a Scotchman, next to his Bible, there is but one book, his native land; but one language, his native tongue—the sweetest, richest, subtlest, most musical of all the living dialects of Europe. Study your Burns, Scott, and Carlyle. Scott, in his Scottish novels only, and of those only the cheerful ones, with the *Heart of Midlothian*, but not the *Bride of Lammermoor*, nor the *Legend of Montross*, nor the *Pirate*. Here is a right list: *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Rob Roy*, *Old Mortality*, *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *Red Gauntlet*, *Heart of Midlothian*. Get any of them you can, in the old large print edition when you have a chance, and study every sentence in them. They are models of every virtue in their order of literature and exhaustive codes of Christian wisdom and ethics."
—John Ruskin.

Coleridge, and a third for Alexandre Dumas, and so forth. Which is the best? That depends on the man; but all are good, and whichever rouses his mind most, and commands his sympathies most powerfully, is in all probability the best for him. Literature represents all the reasonings and feelings and passions of civilised men in all ages. As Coleridge says —

All thoughts, all passions, all desires,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame.

We may apply the words to genius. To select any particular variety as best for all is as absurd as to say that every man ought to be a priest or that every man ought to be a soldier. But this I may say, Take hold anywhere, read what you really like and not what some one tells you that you ought to like; let your reading be part of your lives. It may have a bearing upon your true interests and the function which you are to discharge in the world; or it may be a relief to the occupations in which you are immersed. Even if it be a mere recreation, let it be such a recreation as may be subservient to your highest development — a rule which is of course applicable to every employment, from preaching to playing football. But,

in any case, remember that reading worthy of the name is not the acquisition of a set of dates and facts, or a knowledge of the correct critical labels, but an occupation which to be pursued to any purpose must be pursued with zeal—must become, if it should not begin by being, a real and keen enjoyment, and which should end by becoming not a mere luxury but a necessity of life.

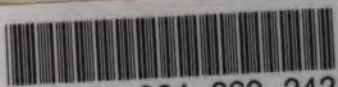
If there should be some people who find, after all, that reading anything is a bore, I shall simply point out to them that there are many occupations besides reading, and some of them quite as useful. You may study science and art, or be active philanthropists, though you never read anything more nearly approaching literature than Euclid or the reports of the association for the benefit of distressed washerwomen. Literature should be content with its genuine worshippers, and not stoop to enlist the services of mere hypocrites. But I am equally certain that most of us can find something to read, something the reading of which can become a ruling passion, something, too, which will please our intellects, give keenness to our perceptions and strength to our sympathies, something which will make us better specimens of the human race, and more fitted to dis-

1/2, 264

charge any of the duties which lie before us. And if fully to qualify ourselves requires a struggle, it is a struggle which will bring an ample reward.

THE END.





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